

BA AND BAPU

Compiled by
MUKULBHAI KALARTHI

Translated from the original in Gujarati
by
GURDIAL MALLIK



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“MAY BA AND BAPU OCCUPY THE
PLACE OF PARENTS IN MY HEART!”

—*Mukulbhai*



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“I can no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my own wife. She moves me as no other woman in the world can. . . . The feeling of an indissoluble bond is there.”

—*Bapu*

“No one in the whole world has a husband like mine. . . .If I am held in high esteem in the world, it is because of my husband.”

—*Ba*

AN HUMBLE HOMAGE

Shri Mukulbhai has urged me to write an introduction to this book. I would not displease him; but it may legitimately be asked whether an introduction to a book like this which presents a series of pen-pictures of the sacred married life of Ba and Bapu is at all necessary. An introduction is generally meant to introduce a book to the reading public—a sort of commendation explaining the value of the book. Such commendation in respect of a book depicting the married life of the greatest couple of our times is obviously out of question; for who indeed would not like to know this part of Ba and Bapu's life! But the occasion provides me with an opportunity to pay my own humble homage to them and this I should not miss.

On the title page of the book Shri Mukulbhai has put in a beautiful invocatory line:

“May Ba and Bapu occupy the place of parents in my heart!”

To me they really occupied the place of parents. My mother passed away when I was only 11 and my father when I was 16. Before his death which came on suddenly he scribbled a short note saying: “I am entrusting my sons to Kashibhai (an uncle of mine). He will look after their education.” Thus my dear uncle and my aunt brought me up till I was 21 when I left the

college and joined the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabar-mati. My uncle's words, when I departed from him, were: "Now I entrust you into Gandhiji's hands."

Thus Ba and Bapu came to be my parents. As I go over these vignettes gleaned from the accounts of their married life a number of sacred incidents spring up afresh before my eyes. And there are quite a few which bring tears—tears in memory of the invaluable moments now gone beyond recall. Those who were given to witness their married life will all have a similar experience. But how many of them are left with us today in 1961! That, however, only enhances the value of the book in so far as it enables those who did not have the good fortune of seeing Ba and Bapu in life, to share this experience in some measure.

Lately new and strange ideas of marriage and conjugal life and of the relationship between man and woman have come to the fore in the modern world. Even India, the home of ancient wisdom, has not escaped their ominous shadow. And if the drift continues, before long in India too a generation—foreseen by Einstein in a slightly different context—might appear which would exclaim: "It is difficult to believe that such a couple (i.e. Ba and Bapu) having such an extraordinary conjugal life lived in flesh and blood in the 20th century. Is it possible for a phenomenon like this to happen in this age of reason and science?"

That Bapu's life and work were extraordinary is now well known. This book, however, presents an important aspect of it which is likely to be slurred

over in the rich mass of his achievements. For his married life was as remarkably extraordinary as, say, his philosophy of Satyagraha and Sarvodaya and non-attachment (*anasakti*) which have drawn greater public attention. Bapu aimed at excellence—at perfection, in whatever he did. We cannot, therefore, afford to neglect any part of his life. In his married life too he strove after the same ideal of perfection and what is more, he achieved it. I cannot describe it except by a comparison with the figures of our legendary history.

Of the many couples in our ancient history Ba and Bapu remind me most of Sage Vasishta and Arundhati. Legend has immortalized them by transforming them into two eternally conjoined stars studded in the infinite expanse of the sky. And in the marriage ritual of the Hindus the bride and the bridegroom are even to this day asked to behold these two stars in the firmament before they embark on the life of the householder. Obviously the ritual is meant to convey an important truth and one should be able to discover it as one goes through this account of Ba and Bapu's married life. Just as Gandhiji's fight for freedom revived as it were the stories of the heroic deeds of the prophets of old, even so his married life provides a living example of the scriptural sayings in regard to the ideal of the Hindu householder's life.

Rama had seen the disastrous result of his father Dasharatha's polygamous life. He therefore lived a strictly monogamous life and inscribed that ideal on the Hindu mind for all time to come. Something similar happened in Bapu's life. His father married more

than once. And Bapu who detects in this an attachment to carnal pleasures has criticized him for it. He has also confessed to a similar failing in himself in his earlier years which incidentally was the reason why he was not by his father's side at the time of his death. It seems that the incident left a strong impact on his mind and indignant with himself over this weakness he might have well resolved that it should be his job in life that the sex urge which man has in common with the brute and is inherent in the flesh must be sublimated. As he advanced in his *sadhana* for such conquest of sex he discovered the ideal of *brahmacharya* in married life and placed it before the world for its acceptance. He said that indulgence in sex is permissible for progeny, but otherwise the married life of the husband and the wife must be a life of *brahmacharya*. He added that his experience showed that this was also the culmination of true conjugal love and happiness.

An examination of the *ashrama* system of Hindu life would reveal that this teaching is implicit in it. The life of the householder, truly lived, evolves duly into that of a *Vanaprastha*, i.e. an anchorite wedded to the service of the society and ultimately into that of a *Sannyasi* wedded to knowledge. Bapu's life provides a concrete example of this process. It is curious that this Hindu idea of the four *ashramas* for right ordering of the human life has hardly been discussed in his writings except indirectly. But his life was shot through and through with the essence of its teaching.

Again, he did not accept the *Sannyasa* ideal with its accent on knowledge in its popular sense of an

external renunciation of the household and its responsibilities, but in the sense in which the Gita interprets it—an internal renunciation based on *tyaga* or non-attachment for the service of the society. He included both these things—observance of *brahmacharya* in married life and the life of *Sannyasa*, in the special sense which he had given to it, in the vows of the Satyagraha Ashram. One may say that this was something which only a rare man or woman could practise. But is that not the essential mark of an ideal? It is the function of a *yuga-purush*—the Representative Man of the Age or the Pioneer—to live the ideal, to concretise it in life and thus to make of it an example for others to follow. Speaking on this point Bapuji had once said: “I have not prescribed *Sannyasa* as popularly understood in Hinduism. But what might be called a new edition of *Sannyasa* has certainly been incorporated in the vows. This new edition is meant for the married.”

Bapu fashioned this new edition of *Sannyasa* in the course of his search for a way of life based on truth and non-violence, and valuable for our age. And Ba played the role of a real helpmate to him in this arduous task. In the passages collected here we see Ba and Bapu engaged in this search and helping each other in the process.

And in this lies Ba's great merit. Hinduism calls wife *sahadharmacharini*, i.e. a partner in the performance of duty. Today we have reduced her almost to the position of *sahakamarthacharini*, i.e. a partner in the enjoyment of pleasures. These glimpses of Ba

and Bapu's life have a special significance at a time like this. In Bapu's life too we meet with incidents characterized by the same pitiless allegiance to duty as in Rama who banished Sita for the sake of *dharma*. His public denunciation of Ba for her lapse in the pursuit of the vow of non-possession is an instance in point. This may seem wicked to us, but the Hindu ideal of conjugal life is to enjoy pleasure and wealth only in accordance with *dharma* without ever transgressing it. In introducing this ideal in the life of the Ashram Ba and Bapu were only setting an example of how a married couple, inspired by the ideals of the highest patriotism and human brotherhood, should live. In practising this ideal Ba gradually became the mother of a vast family of the entire nation. It is hardly necessary to say how difficult was the path they had chosen to follow. It was this which made Ba and Bapu the parents of our nation.

A question which would seem to deserve consideration is: Did Bapu learn or acquire anything from Ba? To this question a student of the inner development of Bapu cannot but return the answer that Bapu without Ba would not have been the Bapu as we know him. *Stri-shakti*, i.e. the peculiar power—the distinctive virtues and capabilities of a woman he discovered only through Ba. And that enabled him to awaken and activate the women of India. Again, it was from Ba that he learnt the lesson of humility which is like a string supporting all the pearls in the garland of his vows. Ba was the very image of humility. The mother's heart is the key to the reservoir of power which lies shut in a woman. At a certain

stage in her life the wife becomes like a mother even to her husband. The Sanskrit word 'Jāyā' for wife, I suppose, has that implication. By his insistence on the practice of *brahmacharya* in married life, he was pointing out the same truth. This charming facet of Ba and Bapu's life provided a glimpse of the noble sublimity of the Hindu ideal of married life. This was also the reason why Bapu's heart rebelled against the use of artificial means of birth-control. He saw in it crass insult to woman and all that she stands for. He pours forth the agony of his heart on this point in one of his letters to Shri Premabehn Kankantak thus:

“To the modern mind *brahmacharya* is *adharmā*—a thing to be shunned as something horrible. And so by birth-control through artificial means they seek free indulgence of sex which they regard as *dharma*. My soul rebels against this. The hunger for sex will not be, cannot be, obliterated from the world. All the same, the world is founded on *brahmacharya* and will so remain for ever.”

The Hindu scriptures have described the wife as *sahadharmacharini*—a partner in the performance of *dharma*. She takes to the life of a householder with a view to enjoying such *kāma* (i.e. sexual pleasures) and *artha* (i.e. worldly prosperity) as are compatible with *dharma*. *Kāma* and *artha* opposed to *dharma* become respectively the source of ill-health and strife. What is the ideal the modern woman has set before herself? Equality of man and woman? Now, this ideal is right so far as it goes, but this equality, according to

the old Hindu view, pertains to the performance of *dharma* and not to the enjoyment of pleasures. Though a *sahabhogacharini* (a partner in the enjoyment of pleasure) she is essentially a *sahadharmacharini*. The following in Miss Manu Gandhi's diary dated 29-7-'47 records what Bapuji said to a visitor on this subject, in the critical days of 1947:

“Has anyone seriously thought who the woman is? She is a goddess, for she is the very image of the spirit of sacrifice. She has such tremendous power that if she only makes up her mind to do a thing and earnestly applies herself to it she can shake even the mountains. Women are not men's slaves. They are men's equal or partners in the religious venture of life. Men must, therefore, look on them as their friends and helpmates. To call them *abala* or weak is to insult the goddess in her.

“. . .The underlying intent in our ancestors' introducing in our daily routine the custom to offer worship to goddesses is simply this that we accord our women-folk a high place in our society. Look at their spirit of sacrifice. What sufferings does a woman willingly go through in order to bring up her young child! In moral courage women far surpass men. The woman is the very embodiment of non-violence, patience and endurance. But what do we see today? People do not shrink even from violating their modesty! What scripture sanctions such heinous deeds? Know for certain that the home, the

society or the nation which does not give due respect and honour to her women-folk is doomed.”

With these words of Bapu, reminiscent of the well-known saying of Manu*, the progenitor of the Hindu race and its supreme law-giver, I close with this my humble homage:

वागर्थाविव संपृक्तौ
बा-बापू ब्रह्मचारिणौ ।
राष्ट्रस्य पितरौ वन्दे
गार्हस्थ्यप्रतिपत्तये ॥

[I bow to Ba and Bapu, united indivisibly like the word and its sense, the ideal *brahma-charis* and the parents of the Nation. May we have from them an insight into the meaning of true married life.]

14-1-'61

Maganbhai P. Desai

(From the original in Gujarati)

* यत्र नार्यस्तु पूजन्ते
रमन्ते तत्र देवताः ॥ (Manu Smriti)

AN IDEAL MARRIED LIFE

Bapu has set before us a unique example through his life and work. But Ba's share in making Bapu what he was was not a small one. Bapu himself said after her death, "I could not have attained to the present height of my inner progress but for Ba's co-operation." A study of the married life of Ba and Bapu will, therefore, surely prove inspiring to the present generation as also to the future generations as long as the old Indian ideal of a householder's life retains its hold on the people's mind.

Bapu's betrothal with Ba took place when Bapu was only six and Ba seven. The actual marriage came off when he was thirteen years of age. Thus, they lived a long married life of sixty-two years. This means that Ba alone of all persons had the unique opportunity to see and understand Bapu's life in all its completeness — both at its weakest and strongest. She was a close witness of Bapu's spiritual progress from over-indulgence in sensual pleasure to perfect *brahmacharya*. When he made a resolve to observe *brahmacharya* she readily accepted it as her own. Her noblest virtue, to quote Bapu's words, was this that 'she was never the temptress.' Thus, as his partner in the performance of life's duty Ba played the role of a real helpmate in the making of Bapu's life. She never came in the way of Bapu's efforts for his spiritual progress. Writing about it in his *Autobiography* Bapu says: "Willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, she has considered herself blessed in following in my foot-steps

and has never stood in the way of my endeavour to lead a life of restraint.”

Numberless men and women came in contact with Bapuji, the relationship between them differing according to the spirit in which they approached him. To them, he was father or teacher or leader and so on. But to Ba he was husband and as such she was in the most intimate contact with him. Seen thus, it becomes evident that these anecdotes relating to their life in this respect are sure to be of great help in understanding Bapu.

With this object in view I have collected here as many as 117 such anecdotes. The books I have used for this purpose are: *Amaran Ba*, *Atmakatha*, *Dakshina Afrikana Satyagrahano Itihasa*, *Ba Bapuni Shili Chhayaman*, *Bapuna Karavasni Kahani*.* Besides these, I have also drawn upon a few stray articles. Needless to say that I am greatly indebted to all these writers. I must also express my grateful thanks to Shri Maganbhai P. Desai for the thoughtful Introduction he has very kindly contributed to this book in answer to my request.

I will deem my labour amply rewarded if this collection prompts the readers to undertake a more earnest study of the significance of Bapu's life and work.

Mukul Kalarthi

(From the original in Gujarati)

* All these books have been published by the Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad-14.

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BA AND BAPU

BA'S SUPREME SELF-SATISFACTION

Bapu was an educated, England-returned gentleman, and a great national leader too, while Ba was illiterate. Furthermore, he made now and again radical changes in his mode of living and thinking and carried them out in all earnestness as well. Thus, Ba had to pass through a perpetual ordeal in order to keep pace with him. So many a person thought that she must be very unhappy, indeed. Once someone sympathizing with her, therefore, wrote to her to this effect. Ba replied, "I have been deeply pained by your letter. We have never met each other before for a sufficiently long time to talk over such matters. So I do not know how you have deduced that Gandhiji has made my life miserable! Did you ever visit me and see me looking sad or starving? No one in the whole world has a husband like mine. He is honoured by all for his persistent pursuit of Truth. Thousands seek his counsel in their affairs. He has never pulled me up without a valid reason, though he always tells me if I am any time at fault or short-sighted

or not very thoughtful. He respects me, while in so many other homes there are so often quarrels. If I am held in high esteem among friends it is because of him. My relatives love me deeply. So nobody is going to believe you when you say that I am unhappy. I am not like you, modern wives, who wish to lord it over their husbands, and if the latter do not surrender themselves to them they go their own different ways. But such a thing ill-becomes a true Hindu wife. Parvati even wished that Shankar would be her husband life after life.”

2

BA, AN IDEAL HELPMATE

In 1913, one day, Shri Kalidasbhai Gandhi an esteemed elder of the family, who lived in Tongat, came to the Phoenix Ashram in Johannesburg to stay there for a few days. At 11 a.m. Bapu had just sat down to his meals, after serving all the other inmates. Ba was engaged at the time in cleaning up the kitchen. Now Kalidasbhai observed this and was rather surprised. For, in the city even an ordinary businessman had a servant in his house to do such job. So he said to Bapu,

“You have made such a radical change in your life and introduced such austere simplicity, too, that poor Kasturbai never seems to have got any chance to enjoy life.”

Bapu replied, interrupting his eating, “But I have never prevented her from doing so.”

Thereupon Ba chimed in somewhat teasingly, “But tell me, have I ever had any luxury or pleasures in your home?”

Bapu responded in the same strain, “But have I even once dissuaded you from wearing silk and ornaments? And when you wanted to wear golden bangles, did I not get these made for you?” Ba replied, “Of course, you gave me all those things. But how could I use them when I saw you leading a life of self-abnegation? I had, therefore, no other alternative but to fall into line with you.”

3

BA: “HAVE AT LEAST SOME DECENCY”

When Bapu was practising as a lawyer at Durban in South Africa, his clerks, one a Hindu Gujarati and the other a Christian South Indian, used to stay with him. They all lived like the members of one family. And it was one of the rules of the house that every one

would remove the chamber-pot from his own room every morning. Once, however, another Christian clerk came to stay with them. Who was to remove his chamber-pot, was now the question. Ba hesitated to do this, while at the same time she did not wish that Bapu should do the job. However, after a little argument she agreed to do the needful. What followed thereafter may best be described in Bapu's own words in his *Autobiography*:

“Even today I can recall the picture of her chiding me, her eyes red with anger, and pearl-drops streaming down her cheeks, as she descended the ladder with the pot in hand. But I was a cruelly kind husband. I regarded myself as her teacher, and so harassed her out of my blind love for her.

I was far from being satisfied by her merely carrying the pot. I would have her do it cheerfully. So I said, raising my voice: ‘I will not stand this nonsense in my house.’

The words pierced her like an arrow.

She shouted back: ‘Keep your house to yourself and let me go.’

I forgot myself, and the spring of compassion dried up in me. I caught her by the hand, dragged the helpless woman to the gate, which was just opposite the ladder, and

proceeded to open it with the intention of pushing her out.

The tears were running down her cheeks in torrents, and she cried: 'Have you no sense of shame? Must you so far forget yourself? Where am I to go? I have no parents or relatives here to harbour me. Being your wife, you think I must put up with your cuffs and kicks? For heaven's sake behave yourself, and shut the gate. Let us not be found making scenes like this!'

I put on a brave face, but was really ashamed and shut the gate. If my wife could not leave me, neither could I leave her. We have had numerous bickerings, but the end has always been peace between us. The wife, with her matchless powers of endurance, has always been the victor.

Today I am in a position to narrate the incident with some detachment, as it belongs to a period out of which I have fortunately emerged. I am no longer a blind, infatuated husband. I am no more my wife's teacher. Kasturba can, if she will, be as unpleasant to me today, as I used to be to her before. We are tried friends, the one no longer regarding the other as the object of lust. She has been

a faithful nurse throughout my illnesses, serving without any thought of reward.”

4

PUBLIC SERVICE AND GIFTS

In 1901, Bapu made plans to return to India, on the completion of his work in South Africa. The Indians living in Natal, decided, therefore, to bid him a befitting farewell. He was, accordingly, presented with a large number of valedictory addresses and costly gifts. The latter included a gold necklace worth fifty guineas, which was given to Ba for her personal use. But Bapu was greatly troubled in his mind at receiving these gifts and, consequently, spent a sleepless night. For, he believed that a public servant had no right to recognition or recompense in this mercenary manner. Furthermore, an acceptance of the gifts might have an adverse effect on Ba and the children, who were at the time being trained for a life of service, on the principle that service is its own reward. He finally decided, however, to convert all the gifts, that had been given to him, into a trust for the service of the Indian community, and to this end, appointed Parsi Rustomji and

some others as trustees. He drafted, accordingly, a letter to this effect. But he thought he should consult also Ba and the children in the matter. As regards the children he felt that they would readily consent to his proposal, but what of Ba? He asked the children, therefore, to plead with their mother. They volunteered to do so in the full hope that they would be able to win her over. But Ba argued, as says Bapu in his *Autobiography*:

“‘You may not need them, your children may not need them. Cajoled, they will dance to your tune. I can understand your not permitting me to wear them. But what about my daughters-in-law? They will be sure to need them. And who knows what will happen tomorrow? I would be the last person to part with gifts, so lovingly given.’

And thus the torrent of argument went on, reinforced in the end by tears. But the children were adamant. And I was unmoved.

I mildly put in: ‘The children have yet to get married. We do not want to see them married young. When they are grown up, they can take care of themselves. And surely we shall not have, for our sons, brides who are fond of ornaments. And if, after all, we need

to provide them with ornaments, I am there. You will ask me then.'

'Ask you? I know you by this time. You deprived me of my ornaments, you would not leave me in peace with them. Fancy you offering to get ornaments for the daughters-in-law! You, who are trying to make *sadhus* of my boys from today! No, the ornaments will not be returned. And, pray, what right have you to my necklace?'

'But,' I rejoined, 'is the necklace given you for your service or for my service?'

'I agree. But service rendered by you is as good as rendered by me. I have toiled and moiled for you day and night. Is that no service? You forced all and sundry on me, making me weep bitter tears, and I slaved for them!'

These were pointed thrusts, and some of them went home. But I was determined to return the ornaments. I somehow succeeded in extorting a consent from her. The gifts received in 1896 and 1901 were all returned.

I have never since regretted the step, and as the years have gone by, my wife has also seen its wisdom. It has saved us from many temptations."

BA'S UNUSUAL CAPACITY TO BEAR SUFFERING

Once, when Bapu was staying in Johannesburg, Ba suffered from bleeding. A friend in Durban suggested an operation. But she was too weak to withstand the effects of the chloroform. However, ultimately she agreed to have the operation, even without the chloroform. Referring to this Bapu said one day to Mahadevbhai, "At the time of the operation I stood a little away from the operation-table. I was trembling. The surgeon's knife was at work. Ba's face visibly showed how much she was suffering. But not even once did any cry of pain escape her lips. I could not bear the painful sight, though outwardly I went on asking Ba to keep up her courage."

Thereupon Mahadevbhai observed, "It was, indeed, a miracle of human capacity to bear suffering."

Bapu rejoined, "Yes, anyone else in her place would have raised such hue and cry. But Ba showed exemplary calm and courage."

BA AND BAPU'S DETERMINATION

Two or three days after Ba had been operated upon successfully in Durban, the doctor let Bapu return to Johannesburg. And both he and his wife looked after Ba, as if she were a member of the family. But soon afterwards he was informed that she was not at all progressing satisfactorily, on the contrary, gradually becoming weaker, at times even becoming unconscious. So the doctor telephoned to Bapu for his permission to let him give her beef tea. Bapu replied that the doctor had better ask Ba herself, and if she wished to have it she could. The doctor, however, asked Bapu to come over, adding that he would not in any way hold himself responsible for the safety of his wife, if he would not permit him to give her the aforesaid foods. Accordingly, Bapu went down the same day to Durban. When he reached there, however, he learnt, to his great dismay, that the doctor had already given meat soup to Ba to drink. "This is downright fraud," said Bapu. Then a heated argument followed between the two. To quote from the *Autobiography* again:

“‘No question of fraud in prescribing medicine or diet for a patient. In fact, we doctors consider it a virtue to deceive patients or their relatives, if thereby we can save our patients,’ said the doctor with determination.

I was deeply pained, but kept cool. The doctor was a good man and a personal friend. He and his wife had laid me under a debt of gratitude, but I was not prepared to put up with his medical morals.

‘Doctor, tell me what you propose to do now. I would never allow my wife to be given meat or beef, even if the denial meant her death, unless, of course, she desired to take it.’

‘You are welcome to your philosophy. I tell you that, so long as you keep your wife under my treatment, I must have the option to give her anything I wish. If you don’t like this, I must regretfully ask you to remove her. I can’t see her die under my roof.’

‘Do you mean to say that I must remove her at once?’

‘Whenever did I ask you to remove her? I only want to be left entirely free. If you do so, my wife and I will do all that is possible for her, and you may go back without the least anxiety on her score. But if you will not understand this simple thing, you will compel

me to ask you to remove your wife from my place.'

I think one of my sons was with me at the time. He entirely agreed with me and said his mother should not be given beef tea. I next spoke to Kasturbai herself. She was really too weak to be consulted in this matter. But I thought it my painful duty to do so. I told her what had passed between the doctor and myself. She gave a resolute reply: 'I will not take beef tea. It is a rare thing in this world to be born as a human being, and I would far rather die in your arms than pollute my body with such abominations.'

I pleaded with her. I told her that she was not bound to follow me. I cited to her the instances of Hindu friends and acquaintances, who had no scruples about taking meat or wine as medicine. But she was adamant. 'No,' said she, 'pray remove me at once.'

I was delighted. Not without some agitation I decided to take her away. I informed the doctor of her resolve. He exclaimed in a rage: 'What a callous man you are! You should have been ashamed to broach the matter to her in her present condition. I tell you your wife is not in a fit state to be removed. She cannot stand the least little hustling. I shouldn't

be surprised if she were to die on the way. But if you must persist, you are free to do so. If you will not give her beef tea, I will not take the risk of keeping her under my roof even for a single day.'

So we decided to leave the place at once. It was drizzling and the station was some distance. We had to take the train from Durban for Phoenix, whence our Settlement was reached by a road of two miles and a half. I was undoubtedly taking a very great risk, but I trusted in God, and proceeded with my task. I sent a messenger to Phoenix in advance, with a message to Mr. West to receive us at the station with a hammock, a bottle of hot milk and one of hot water, and six men to carry Kasturbai in the hammock. I got a rickshaw to enable me to take her by the next available train, put her into it in that dangerous condition, and marched away.

Kasturbai needed no cheering up. On the contrary, she comforted me, saying: 'Nothing will happen to me. Don't worry.'

She was mere skin and bone, having had no nourishment for days. The station platform was very large, and as the rickshaw could not be taken inside, one had to walk some distance before one could reach the train. So I carried

her in my arms and put her into the compartment. From Phoenix we carried her in the hammock, and there she slowly picked up strength under hydropathic treatment.”

Within two or three days of their arrival at Phoenix a Swami visited them. He pleaded with Ba to take meat. He held forth on the religious harmlessness of taking meat, citing authorities from Manu. Ba's faith was, however, unshakable. Therefore she said to the Swami, to quote again from Bapu's *Autobiography*: “Swamiji, whatever you may say, I do not want to recover by means of beef tea. Pray don't worry me any more. You may discuss the thing with my husband and children, if you like. But my mind is made up.”

7

BAPU'S DISCRIMINATION AND BA'S DETERMINATION

In 1913, in South Africa, the Government passed a law that only marriages performed according to the Christian rites and registered with the Registrar of Marriages would be considered valid. This meant that at one stroke the lawfully wedded wives of the Hindus,

Moslems, Parsis and those of the followers of the other faiths were reduced to the shameful status of mistresses. Now such a position between the husbands and the wives was intolerable. Therefore, Bapu carried on negotiations with the Government for putting an end to this offensive indignity, but in vain. Consequently, he decided upon starting a non-violent struggle to have the humiliating grievance redressed and justice done to those affected by the statute. This time, he felt, he would like also to invite the women to take part in the crusade. But their participation would, he knew, involve certain grave risks. For instance, most of the women living in the Phoenix Ashram were his relatives. They might agree to join the struggle, not because of their own inner conviction of the righteousness of the cause, but out of respect for his wishes. And once they were in, they would be sent to jail, where, not being used to particular rigorous discipline and diet of the place, they might become nervous and so eventually tender an apology to the authorities. All this, Bapu argued with himself, would tend to weaken the morale of the other participants. For this reason he was not inclined even to draw Ba into the struggle. Eventually he resolved to

let the women decide for themselves, believing as he did, that in such matters it was best to leave the initiative to them. So Bapu waited for a favourable opportunity to tell Ba what was passing through his mind.

And such an opportunity came along before long. One day Ba was baking bread and Shri Ravjibhai Patel, who was sitting nearby was helping her in this chare. At the time Bapu was not doing anything very important. So all of a sudden, casually, he said to Ba, "Have you heard?"

"What?" Ba asked.

Bapu laughed a little and answered, "Till today you were my lawfully wedded wife. But now you will cease to be such."

"Who says that?" Ba inquired raising her eye-brows, "you are always discovering something novel."

Bapu rejoined, "This is not my discovery. It is General Smuts, who has declared and decreed that only wives, married according to the Christian rites, have a right to call themselves such, all the other wives belonging to the other faiths, will be considered as kept women."

Ba flared up, "What nonsense! Who on earth has put this fantastic notion into his

head?" Bapu then asked Ba what she and the other women, thus affected by the debasing and demoralizing decree, proposed to do under the circumstances.

Ba replied, "What can we do?"

Bapu, who was all along waiting for a favourable opportunity to speak out his mind, smiled and answered, "Like us men, you, too, should fight the Government and claim your rightful and legitimate status."

Ba countered, "But is it not enough that you, as we know, are already courting arrest?"

Bapu argued, "But you also should do so for the sake of preserving your own self-respect."

At this Ba was rather surprised. So she said, "Go to jail? How can we women go to jail?"

Bapu replied, "Why not? If men are prepared to undergo suffering and hardship, why not women? Rama was followed by Sita, Harishchandra by Taramati and Nala by Damayanti. They all suffered untold hardships, you know, along with their menfolk."

"But they were goddesses," argued Ba, "and we are only ordinary mortals. We do not have courage like theirs."

"But that does not matter in the least," Bapu said. "If we act like them one day we

shall become like them also. You and I belong to the dynasties of Sita and Rama. If Sita had stayed back in the palace, who would have called her 'Revered Mother'? If Taramati had hesitated to offer herself for sale, and if Damayanti had not gone with Nala into the forest, who would have called them 'True Wives'? So you, too, if you do not want to be stamped with the stigma of the mistress, you must be prepared to go to prison for the sake of your honour."

Ba was quiet for some time. Then she said, "So you want me to go to jail. Perhaps, that is the only thing that remains to be done. Well, then I shall go. But will the jail food suit my weak health?"

Bapu answered, "It is not I who am asking you to go to jail. It is for the sake of your own self-respect that you have to do that, of course, if you feel it so. If you do not get suitable food, then you can ask them to let you have fruit."

"But will they let me have fruit?" queried Ba.

"If they do not," replied Bapu, "then you go on fast till they relent."

Whereupon Ba laughed and said, "You have certainly shown me the way to die. And

I feel that once I go to jail, I shall not come out of it alive.”

Bapu joined in the laughter and added “I also wish that to happen. For, if you pass away, while in prison, then I shall worship you as the world-mother.”

“Well, then I am quite willing to court arrest,” Ba exclaimed with visible determination.

This made Bapu very happy, indeed. And when Ba left the room for a while, he said to Shri Ravjibhai, “It is Ba’s unique virtue that, whether she likes it or not, she ultimately complies with my wishes.”

8

“YOU HAVE GROWN VERY OLD INDEED !”

In South Africa once, in the course of the non-violent campaign against the existing marriage laws for the Indians, Ba and several other women were arrested. They were first sent to Volksrust jail. But as the food arrangements there were very unsatisfactory for them, they were subsequently transferred to Maritzburg jail. Before the transfer, however, it came

somehow to be known that Ba was not being supplied with fruit, and this caused extreme hardship to her. For, she had vowed to take only fruit while in prison, and if the authorities did not let her have it, she would starve herself, unmindful even of the risk of death. The public mind was naturally much disturbed by the news. But the authorities were quite indifferent, saying to her, "If you had to resort to such tricks, then why did you at all court arrest?" This left to Ba no other alternative except to go on fast. On the fourth day of the fast the matron, however, relented somewhat and said, "When any day we do not get our morning tea in time, we feel so miserable. And here you are with a weak body, who have been without any food and drink for three days! But we are helpless in the matter. We can, therefore, only plead with you to take whatever food is given to you here." On the fifth day the Government eventually consented to let her have fruit, but only in a very small quantity. The result was that during the three months of her detention she lived on well-nigh starvation food, and consequently, when she came out of the prison, she was reduced to a skeleton. When Bapu, who met her at the gate of the prison, saw her, he said

with visible emotion, "You have grown very old indeed." But some of those, who also saw that Ba was all bones and no flesh, could not help shedding tears.

9

HOW BAPU NURSED BA!

In South Africa once, on coming out of the prison, Ba was in very poor health. Her digestive system was seriously upset. She could not retain any food. There was swelling on her hands and feet. Some of the household remedies and even the doctor's treatment had failed to produce any visible improvement. So one day Bapu said to Ba, "If you have faith in me, I would like to try my own treatment on you." Ba agreed to this. Bapu then told her that she would have to fast for fourteen days and also take margosa juice as medicine. During this period Bapu served Ba with such exemplary love, sympathy and efficiency, that it is difficult to describe it adequately in words. He attended to every detail himself, for example, helping Ba to clean her teeth, to take coffee, carrying her to a cot under a tree for rest in the day, massaging her, etc.

However, Bapu did not know how to comb her hair. So this job was assigned to Kashiba*. One day she was a little late in coming. So Bapu himself oiled and combed Ba's hair. Just then Kashiba arrived. "You will now do the rest," Bapu said to her, "because I do not know how to coil up the hair into a braid." As a result of Bapu's affectionate treatment and nursing, Ba was restored ultimately to health after a prolonged illness.

10

BAPU'S SATYAGRAHA IN THE HOUSE !

In South Africa Ba once suffered from haemorrhage. She was, therefore, operated upon. But the trouble returned after some time. Bapu then tried hydropathic treatment. This, too, did not prove of any avail. Finally he asked her to give up salt and pulses in her diet. Thereupon Ba retorted, "But even you would not give up these two articles of food if you were so advised."

Bapu replied, — to quote from his *Autobiography*: "“You are mistaken. If I was ailing

*Wife of Shri Chhaganlal Gandhi and mother of Shri Prabhudas Gandhi

and the doctor advised me to give up these or any other edibles, I should unhesitatingly do so. However, from today, without any medical advice, I give up salt and pulses for one year, whether you do so or not!

At this decision of mine she was rudely shocked and exclaimed in deep sorrow: 'Pray forgive me. Knowing you, I should not have provoked you. I promise to abstain from these things, but for heaven's sake take back your vow. This is too hard on me.'

'It is very good for you to forego these articles. I have not the slightest doubt that you will be all the better without them. As for me, I cannot retract a vow seriously taken. And it is sure to benefit me, for all restraint, whatever prompts it, is wholesome for men. You will, therefore, leave me alone. It will be a test for me, and a moral support to you in carrying out your resolve.'

So she gave me up, saying, 'You are too obstinate! You will listen to none!' And she sought relief in tears."

BAPU AFRAID OF BA!

Once, while in South Africa, Ba fell seriously ill. There was swelling here and there on her body. Bapu, therefore, used to massage the swollen parts with margosa oil. One day he poured out the oil for the purpose into a brass saucer. Next day just when Bapu was pouring out coffee into the brass cup and saucer, to give it to Ba to drink, Kashiba arrived there. Bapu, whose sense of smell was not very strong, asked her to smell the saucer. "Yes," she replied, "the saucer does smell somewhat oily." At this he was a little alarmed and, as if he was afraid of Ba, he exclaimed, "Had I taken the saucer to Ba she would have taken me to task severely, indeed, for being so inefficient in doing my chares."

BA'S SIMPLICITY

Among Bapu's close associates, Ba's belongings,—the bed-roll and the box,—were the minimum. None could ever beat her, in spite of their best efforts to have the fewest wants and yet living a life of beautiful simplicity. Referring to this aspect of her personality, Bapu once said, "Even I, who have always been so keenly intent on observing uttermost simplicity, have twice over of what Ba possesses."

VOW OF POVERTY

When Bapu was staying in the Ashram at Sabarmati, now and again some thieves would break in and take away clothes and pots and pans of the inmates. As the inmates were all under a vow of poverty, they could not lay their hands on anything more precious. Once, however, Ba's two boxes, containing clothes, were stolen. Their contents were removed, while the empty boxes were

thrown away in the neighbouring fields. Referring to this, Bapu asked, "What I fail to understand is how Ba could at all have two boxes of clothes? For, she does not wear a different sari every day."

Ba replied, "Rami and Manu (daughters of Bapu's eldest son, Harilalbai) have lost their mother, as you know. Sometime they come to stay with me. I kept away all the saris and pieces of Khadi, given to me as presents from time to time, so that I can give them these things as gifts."

Bapu rejoined, "But we cannot do that at all. Even the articles, given as gifts, if they are not of immediate use to the person to whom they are given, have to be deposited in the office." In the evening, after prayers, he continued the argument: "We, who are under a vow of poverty, cannot afford to give any gifts. Such an action is unbecoming of us. All that we can do is to extend only hospitality to the girls, whenever they come to stay among us."

From that day onward, Ba did not accumulate even two extra articles of wear, being quite content with the clothes, which were absolutely necessary.

BA'S NON-ATTACHMENT

Once some one, who had joined the Ashram only lately, referring to the rule against the drinking of tea and coffee, (since these, as it was believed then, were harmful for one's health) asked Bapu in the course of conversation, "If this is so, then, why does Ba take coffee?"

Immediately Bapu answered, "But you have no idea of how much Ba has already given up. This is the only luxury or habit which she has. Were I to compel her to abandon even this, then I would be a tyrant indeed." In the end, however, Ba gave up of her own sweet will even the habit of coffee-drinking. But, alas! the newcomer had not realized that in the course of her long life of companionship with Bapu, Ba had cultivated the spirit of non-attachment, non-possession in things, both big and small, as an art. Bapu, of course, was fully conscious of her exemplary self-abnegation.

BA, THE MOTHER OF THE POOR

It was in 1941. Ba was expected back from Maroli. All the inmates of the Sevagram Ashram were, therefore, eagerly waiting for her. One particular sister, on a visit to the place at the time, specially stayed on to meet her. The morning train arrived. But Ba did not come in it. So this sister asked Bapu, "I am sure Ba will now come by the evening train, will she not?"

Bapu replied, "If Ba is the mother of the rich, she will come by the evening train. And if she is the mother of the poor, she will travel via Surat by the Tapti-Valley route and reach here tomorrow morning."

And lo! Next morning Ba arrived in Sevagram.

BA: "WHEN WE ARE WITH HIM, THEN THAT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE."

In 1932, in Yeravda prison, when Bapu undertook the fast unto death on behalf of the Harijans, Ba was at the time in Sabarmati jail. Naturally, therefore, she felt very anxious about him, even though she was used to such rigorous practices of his. Once she said to her fellow sister-prisoners, "We have read the Bhagavata, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata, but nowhere do we come across any reference to fasts like those which Bapu undertakes now and again. But, then, he is a type apart. However, will he be able to go through his fast this time?"

The sisters comforted her by saying that the Government would provide Bapu with whatever conveniences and amenities he needs.

"But will he ever ask for any of these?" Ba at once asked back. "Do you not know he is always a non-co-operator in this respect?"

Then she paused for a moment and continued, "Of course, Mahadev, Vallabhbhai and Sarojinidevi are there with him. And so there

is no particular cause for me to feel unnecessarily anxious. But when we are there, then, that makes all the difference.”

17

BA'S EVER-WATCHFUL EYE

In 1932 Bapu, while in the Yeravda prison, fasted unto death on behalf of the Harijans, whom the Government wished to separate from the Hindu fold for the purposes of the communal award. At that time Ba was in the Sabarmati jail. She naturally felt greatly concerned about his health and ardently desired to be near him to serve him. For, none knew his needs and ways better than Ba. Soon, however, she was transferred to the Yeravda prison. On reaching there she jokingly said to Bapu, “Once again the old story?” Then she at once plunged herself into his service, all the time tending him silently and lovingly.

THE MENDICANTS — BA AND BAPU

In 1937 Bapu was on a visit to Calcutta. Suddenly he was taken ill there. He was, therefore, brought back to Sevagram. In those days, he occupied a room along with some others. In order to give him the necessary convenience and quiet, it was felt that during his illness at least, he should stay in a separate room alone by himself. For this purpose, Mirabehn vacated her own room. But Bapu would not move into it, saying that the room had been expressly built for the personal use of Mira and for the Khadi work. So he insisted on sticking to his own particular corner of the room. But if he stayed there, his fellow-inmates would be disturbed—something which Bapu would never like. Consequently, Ba offered her room to him. Now in addition to Bapu, his attendants also stayed there. Therefore, Ba and her grandson, Kahana, slept in the verandah, never for a moment thinking that it was only her right to share the room with Bapu and not of others.

Next morning, while taking his breakfast, Bapu said to those present at the time, “This

room was built specially for Ba and now I have taken possession of it! Never before did she have a separate room. For, whatever she has, she always shares with others. Even after she got this room, which was built to give her a little more comfort and quiet in her old age, she has been doing this. For example, quite a number of girls, after whom Ba has been looking, have stayed here. But if I stayed here, then Ba would have to go. The fact of the matter is, that wherever I happen to go, the place is turned into a wayside inn. And this makes me feel very uneasy. But Ba has never complained even once. And so I can have from Ba whatever I need. Indeed, she has invariably acquiesced in my wishes and put up in her room, whomsoever I have sent to her.”

Then Bapu laughed and added,—Ba was at the time sitting with him— “And all this is as it ought to be. Is it not? If the husband says one thing, and the wife another, then their life becomes unpleasant. But in the present case, to whatever the husband has said, the wife has always consented.”

Hearing this, Ba, too, could not help bursting into laughter.

BA IN BAPU'S FOOTSTEPS

In 1929 Bapu went to Banaras. There the orthodox Hindus were up in arms against him. At a public meeting, which he was to address, therefore, there were great disorder and commotion. Ba heard about this. At once she got up to go to the meeting. So Devadasbhai and Jawaharlalji got into a car with her. On the way, the car was intercepted by an unruly crowd. Thereupon Jawaharlalji got out of the car and elbowed some of them out of the way and they dispersed. But the whole road was so densely crowded that Ba got separated from her companions. In the meantime, someone brought the news that stones were being hurled at the meeting. Forthwith Ba exclaimed, "How can I at all stay away from the meeting, where Bapu is present and the people are throwing about stones?" And instantly she rushed to the place of the meeting and, lo! there, by Bapu's side, stood Ba!

BA, A SHARER IN BAPU'S HARDSHIPS

In 1929 Bapu went to Kausani, up in the Himalayas. It was then very cold and foggy there. But Bapu, as usual, slept at night out in the open. One day a lion's cub visited the place and went round Bapu's cot. Some of the workers from Nainital, who were there at the time to attend to Bapu's needs, saw this. Therefore, next day they suggested to Bapu to sleep indoors. For a moment he looked seriously engaged in thought. All the same he refused to oblige them, simply laughing away their fear. Thereupon Ba, who usually slept indoors, also carried her cot outside and slept there!

BAPU'S RENUNCIATION

One night, in Sabarmati, all of a sudden, Bapu got up from his sleep and began to walk away from the Ashram. Now Ba and another sister, who slept in an opposite room, saw this. Both of them, therefore, followed Bapu

tiptoe, wondering where he could be going, whether like Buddha he, too, was going to renounce them all. After some time, however, when he retraced his footsteps, he noticed Ba and her companion. He laughed and said, "Did you think that I was running away?"

The fact of the matter was that someone had been suddenly bitten by a scorpion on the road and Bapu, hearing his cry of pain, was awakened from his sleep.

22

A SEVERE TEST OF BA'S LOVE FOR HER CHILDREN

It was but natural that Ba should have deep love for her children and grandchildren. But now that both she and Bapu had dedicated their lives to the Ashram, and the Ashram was conducted with public money, once a question arose as to how to account for the expenses, incurred on their children and grandchildren, who off and on came to meet them and stayed in the Ashram for a few days. But Bapu solved it by deciding that all the visitors should pay their own expenses. This was, however, too much of a test of Ba's love for her

own kith and kin. Nonetheless, as usual, eventually, she acquiesced in the decision and thereafter, whenever any of her relatives among the visitors, would be about to leave, she would go up to the Manager of the Ashram with rather a heavy heart and say, "So-and-so is about to go away. Therefore, you will please hand over his bill to him."

23

BA — THE ONE GREAT ATTRACTION OF THE ASHRAM

Ba was the one central attraction of the Ashram. This was due to the fact that she looked after the visitors and inmates very affectionately and attended also to their particular, personal needs. Furthermore, within a short time of her meeting any one, she would gather enough information about him to make him feel as if he were her own kin. She often disregarded even some of the Ashram rules for the sake of the comfort of the guests, for example, serving tea to Mr. C. F. Andrews and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, coffee to Rajaji, when such drinks were generally not permitted. And if any time Bapu gently protested against

all this on the plea that she was spoiling them, she would retort, "You have no right to lord it over others. But you can do that to me." Again, not seldom would Rajendra Prasadji, Motilalji, Maulana Azad and other leaders after they had finished their particular business with Bapu, go up to Ba for a friendly chat, though Vallabhbhai would just play with Kahana, Ba and Bapu's grandson. For instance, Maulana Saheb would inquire after her health, Jawaharlalji would tell her something revolutionary. And if any time he said goodbye to her only with folded hands, without saying a word, she would feel rather worried and straightaway ask Bapu pointedly, if he had said anything to displease him, because at the time of going away Jawaharlalji looked somewhat sad. Bapu, however, would simply laugh it out saying, "It appears you are also becoming moody like Jawaharlal. However, this time there was no difference of opinion at all between us."

Thus, Ba was the pivot for every one's love and friendliness.

BA'S INITIATION INTO THE ASHRAM LIFE

In 1924, in the Satyagraha Ashram, at Sabarmati, one night Ba was rather late in reaching Bapu's room to massage his head with oil. For, she had been delayed in the kitchen after the usual hour by her preparing some food for the journey for her son, Ramadasbhai, who was going away that night. When asked the reason for her being late, she told Bapu all this, adding that she could not depute any one else to do the job as none was nearby at the time. Bapu, then said to her, "You are already so much overworked, because you take on too many things,—preparing food in the kitchen, looking after the visitors, spinning cloth for yourself, etc. Over and above all this, you must now also prepare special food for Ramadas to take on the journey. But should you do all that? I ask. For, if you go on doing such things, there will be no end to them at all. For example, tomorrow you may find that some one else is going out on a journey, like Tulasi going to Nepal, Surendra going to Delhi, then you will do likewise for them, too."

Ba replied, "Of course not. But Ramadas is my son, that is why I did not mind even being late for massaging your head. Further, it will not be possible for me to cater to every one's special requirements. But you are no doubt a *Mahatma* and all here are like your own sons to you. However, I am not as yet a *Mahatma*. This does not mean that I love the others any less. But truth to tell, they are not to me like Ramadas. So can I not occasionally prepare some special food for him? You are, indeed, very hard on me, even in such small matters."

Bapu rejoined, "Well, all this is worth thinking about. However, will you please tell me where we are sitting at present?"

Ba: "In the Satyagraha Ashram."

Bapu: "But why are we here? Why did we sell our house in Rajkot and come away to this Ashram?"

Ba: "So that we all, brothers and sisters, may together serve our country."

Bapu: "Then do those who have come here from distant places, look upon us as less than their own parents?"

Ba: "Certainly not. They love you and me devotedly, indeed, and for you particularly they have abounding affection. They have given

up their all, in order that under your inspiration and guidance, they may learn how to serve India wisely and well, according to their capacity.”

Bapu: “Then just think, under these circumstances what our duty towards them is. It is quite natural for a mother to love her own child more than others. So in a way there is nothing wrong in your loving Ramadas more. But all that would have held good if we were still living in Rajkot and Ramadas, Devadas and others were entitled to a share in the paternal property. But this Ashram is for Satyagrahi workers. Therefore, Ramadas, too, should live like others. Then how is it that you consider those, who look upon you as more than their own mother, less than Ramadas? Remember, the whole world is watching us and is expecting great things from us.”

Ba listened to all this calmly and with great attention, and remained quiet.

TRAINING OF ASHRAM SISTERS

In the Ashram in Sabarmati, Bapu carried on several experiments in food. He also wished that all should have food from the community-kitchen, the vegetables being supplied from the Ashram garden. Once there was a large supply of pumpkins. It was like all other vegetables, when available, served boiled and saltless (though whoever wanted salt could have it). However, Manibehn* and Durgabehn† and a few others found it difficult to digest the vegetable and, in consequence, suffered great discomfort. But none dared to complain to Bapu about it, knowing his enthusiasm for such experiments. Now one day Manibehn composed a *garbi* song on the pumpkin. Ba happened to hear this. So at once she went to Bapu and told him the whole story. She argued, “The pumpkin, in order to be digestible, has to be seasoned with some spices. It is never taken boiled. That is why Durgabehn and the other sisters have been feeling so sick.”

Next day after the evening prayers, Bapu remarked, “I am told a new poet is born in our Ashram.”

* Wife of Shri Naraharibhai Parikh

† Wife of Shri Mahadevbhai Desai

Then he asked Manibehn to sing her song on the pumpkin.

Bapu laughed as he listened to the song and then inquired, who among the people present would like thereafter to take the pumpkins seasoned, so that he might note down their names. He believed that the sisters concerned would hesitate to give their names. But, lo! Ba spoke out, "We simply refuse to give our names. We womenfolk shall decide the matter for ourselves."

Bapu replied, "Well, let it be so. But do not include the girls and boys in your consultation. For, I know, they prefer unspiced food."

Ba retorted, "Well, you cannot cajole them like that. However, we shall see how many of them you can keep with you."

Then the sisters listed down the names of the persons concerned and thus obtained permission to take spiced food.

But Bapu was still undaunted. For, often while taking his meals, he would tease the sisters, whoever happened to be sitting in front of him at the moment, saying, "Well, how do you like the spiced vegetable?"

Ba however proved quite a match for him. She threw back, "You had better keep quiet on this subject. For, do you not remember

the days when every Sunday you would ask me to prepare some delicacies for you and you would gulp them down lustily?"

Thereupon all burst into laughter.

26

THE GHEE-FED LAMP

Once, in Sevagram, on the occasion of Bapu's birthday, at the evening prayers Ba lighted a small earthen-lamp and fed it with ghee. Not only the Ashramites but also a large number of villagers were present at the time. They were all eagerly waiting to hear Bapu speak. Bapu, however, sat quiet, all the time intently looking at the lamp. Ba was sitting near him. Then, before he began his discourse, he just asked, "Who has brought this lamp here?"

Ba answered, "I."

Bapu inquired again, "From where?"

Ba rejoined, "From the village. For, today is your birthday."

Bapu remained silent for some time. Then he continued in a serious tone, "But nothing could have been worse on the present occasion than to have lighted a lamp and fed it with

ghee. I see daily what kind of a miserable life the people in our neighbourhood live. They have not even a dry loaf to eat and yet in the Ashram, a lamp is being fed with ghee!”

Then he turned to Ba and said, “After all these years that we have lived together, is this all that you have learnt from me? What, if today is my birthday? The day should have been devoted to the doing of good deeds, and not, instead, a sin like this committed. How dare we misuse any article, which the poorest peasant in the land cannot afford?”

27

**BA : “WELL, YOU KNOW NOW,
WHAT BAPU IS LIKE!”**

Bapu could never stand any slipshod work by any one. Not only this, he was extremely punctilious even about little things and minor details. Therefore, he used to pull up at once whosoever was careless in doing his job. Once someone came to stay with Bapu for a few days. At night one day, Bapu asked him to massage his feet. In reply, however, the visitor not being familiar with his ways, just suggested, “If we were to engage an expert for this kind of work, how would that be?”

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“No,” Bapu replied, “because I like only some relative or friend to massage me.”

“But I do not know massaging at all!” he countered. “However, if you teach me how to do it, I shall try.”

Thereafter the novice did what he was told, but Bapu was not satisfied. So Bapu exclaimed, “Except Ba, none knows how to massage me properly.”

Later, the visitor happened to talk to Ba of his trying experience to work under Bapu and casually asked, “But how have you been able to put up with Bapu all these years?”

Ba only laughed and answered, “Well, Bapu is a hard taskmaster. It is not so easy to work under him, as the people so often think it to be.”

28

BA: “YOU! AFRAID OF ME?”

In Sabarmati, Ba was in charge of the Ashram kitchen. In addition to the inmates there would be almost every day a number of visitors and guests. But she always rose to the occasion. Under her, at one time, there was an assistant, a young lad from Travancore. Once at noon, after the kitchen had been cleaned

up, all of a sudden Pandit Motilal Nehru and a few other visitors arrived. Since Ba had just gone to her room to rest, Bapu quietly called the boy and asked him to prepare with Kusumbehn's co-operation, the lunch for the guests, adding that only in case of need, was Ba to be disturbed. He also told the boy that everything in the kitchen was to be handled carefully and, in the end, kept back in its proper place. But as the boy and Kusumbehn were working, accidentally a plate fell down on the floor with a bang. Ba was, consequently, roused from her siesta, as she feared lest the cat might have toppled the milk-pot. But when, instead, she saw that the kitchen was again functioning, she inquired what the matter was. When the whole story was told to her, she asked somewhat angrily, "But why did you people not wake me up?" The boy replied tactfully, "We had planned to do so, but, as you were resting, only after all the preliminary arrangements had been made." To this Ba rejoined, "But you, too, were tired like me. So if you could work again so soon, could not I?" Saying this she straightaway joined them in the work. Later, in the evening, after the guests had gone, she took Bapu to task and said, "Why did you entrust the work of

preparing the midday meal for the guests to the young people? Am I such an idler?" Bapu replied, "As you know and to tell you the truth, I am at such times, afraid of you."

"You! Afraid of me?" Ba rejoined with a loud laugh.

29

BA'S WEDDING-DAY

During the detention of Bapu and his party in the Aga Khan Palace, in Poona, one day Dr. Gilder received as a gift a parcel of mangoes to mark the 29th anniversary of his wedding. On this happy occasion, accordingly, he was the recipient of congratulations from all quarters. Incidentally, however, Ba asked Bapu, "How many years ago is it that we were married?"

Bapu burst into laughter and then, as it were, to tease Ba he said to those present at the time, "It seems Ba, too, wishes to celebrate her wedding anniversary."

Whereupon all joined in the laughter, not excluding Ba herself, though at first she had felt somewhat annoyed at what Bapu had said.

BA'S GIFT

Once an inmate of Santiniketan visited Sevagram. As he was about to go away after taking leave of Bapu, who had graciously accompanied him as far as the gate of the Ashram, the guest heard some one calling out to him. And as he turned back his face to see who it was, he discovered that it was Ba. So he went up to her and inquired if she wished to say anything to him. In reply, she only gave him a packet, saying, "Here is something for your long journey to Santiniketan. Perhaps, you know, that Bapu has been for sometime experimenting with a new kind of yeast bread. I have baked one with my own hands for you. Let me know, however, after you reach Santiniketan how you relished the bread." In return, to express his heartfelt gratitude to Ba for her motherly concern for him, once again he bowed reverently to her.

BA: "WHAT NONSENSE IS THIS?"

During the 1932 fast Bapu was visited one day by Ba. He feared that she would reprimand him for having embarked on the fast. So to disarm her just as she arrived, he caught hold of her by the hand and drew her to his side. At this Ba exclaimed, "What is this nonsense?"

Bapu then asked Ba, "Are you not prepared to die with me?"

Ba answered, "Why should I? But you had first better give up your fast before you talk of anything else to me. May God prevail upon you to do this!"

Whereupon Bapu laughed and said, "Look at your hollowed-out cheeks. It appears our Superintendent Bhandari looks after me better than your Superintendent Advani did after you."

Just then, looking in the direction of Shri Bhandari, Ba smiled and jokingly remarked, "No, the Sindhis are any day better than the Punjabis!"

Shri Bhandari joined in the joke, though he told Ba that she was doing him great injustice.

In this way, the whole atmosphere became lighter.

32

BA'S TOUCHING FAREWELL

During Bapu's fast in jail in 1932, which he undertook to assert that the Harijans are within the fold of Hinduism, Ba was allowed by the Government to stay with him. No sooner, however, was the fast over than she had to leave. Ba felt the separation rather acutely. She wished, however, before she left Bapu, to prepare his evening meal. But Bapu said, "No, please go at once. You cannot keep the jailer waiting."

Ba answered with a heavy heart, "All right, then, but you had better come home soon. Good-bye." There were tears in her eyes.

Bapu affectionately patted her on the cheek, saying, "Thank God, that we could be together all these days. Have no anxiety of any kind. As regards my coming home, whether you will come here or I shall come to you, I do not know."

Ba then touched Bapu's feet and took leave of him.

52

BA'S BIG HEART

Even after Bapu's 1932 fast in jail, Ba was permitted by the Government to visit him now and again. But she did not quite like this. As she said one day, "I shall stop coming here hereafter. There are so many others in jail and some of them ill as well. And yet their relatives are not allowed to visit them. Often I feel concerned about Ramadas and Bapu. Then at once I think of the thousands of wives and mothers, who must be feeling anxious about their husbands and sons, as I do about mine. Well, God takes care of everyone. The Government, however, gave me this opportunity to visit Bapu, but I must not take any further advantage of its goodness."

BAPU'S LOVE FOR BA

After the 1932 fast, whenever Ba visited Bapu he would always wish to have the maximum service from Ba, as if to make up for the period when she used to be away. One day seeing Ba thus overworked and tired out, Sardar Patel said to Bapu, "She is feeling sleepy. Let her rest."

Bapu answered, "But I know that she would do that only after I have gone to sleep." Then he had his feet massaged by Ba, whose touch was very soothing.

On another occasion someone brought white pumpkin-pudding for Bapu, while Ba also brought some at the same time. At once Bapu ate up first what Ba had brought!

BAPU: "BA'S COURAGE IS ENDLESS".

During his 1933 fast, in Yeravda prison, Poona, Ba was allowed once to visit Bapu for fifteen minutes. When she arrived there, he was sleeping on a cot. She went up to him and touched his feet, and then gently and with a smile she reprimanded him, "I see that again

you are up to your old game! When the permission to visit you was granted to me by the Government, my first impulse was not to avail myself of it. Then I thought, that to do so would seem rude. After I had my bath, however, the Jail Superintendent informed me that till then he had not received the Government order to let me stay with you. But, he added, he could bring me to you, though only for fifteen minutes, as you happen to be staying in the European ward. Thereupon, I said to the Superintendent, 'In that case, you should not have brought me here at all.'"

This answer of Ba met with the approval of Bapu who, it being his day of silence, indicated it with a nod of his head.

Bapu then inquired about several of the women workers like Premabehn and Durgabehn and others, and Ba gave him all the information about them. Ba continued, "When we were released, for a moment we thought we would break the law again on reaching Ahmedabad and offer ourselves for arrest. But most of my companions did not quite relish the idea, because they were eager to meet their families." Ba told him a few more things besides.

As the interview was about to end, Bapu wrote down on a piece of paper, "Keep up your courage. Do not come again, if it is to be only for fifteen minutes. Remember me to all the sisters. God will protect me. Do not feel anxious."

Ba replied, "Of course, God will protect us all and you. But you had better give up your fast soon." She then bid good-bye to Bapu.

After she went away, Bapu wrote on a chit, "Ba's courage is, indeed, inexhaustible", and passed it on to his companion, Mahadev-bhai.

36

BA: "BUT WHY ARE YOU SO NERVOUS?"

One day Ba and Bapu were out for their usual walk. Suddenly Bapu hurt one of the toes of his feet and some blood oozed out. Whereupon Bapu asked Ba to tie up the wounded toe with a bandage quickly. He looked a little nervous. So Ba said, "You say, you are not afraid even of death. And yet, this little bleeding has made you so nervous!"

Bapu answered, "You see, this body belongs to the people. So if I am indifferent

and the wound becomes septic I may be disabled for a few days, and then my work will be intercepted. To do so would be to betray the people's faith in me."

37

**BAPU: "WELL, THAT IS JUST
LIKE BA!"**

When Shri Ramanarayan Chaudhary came first to the Ashram in Sabarmati, he was suffering from some skin trouble. So Bapu began to treat him. One day he suggested to the patient that he should daily take some raisins in his food. For this purpose he sent him to Ba. But hardly had he gone a few steps, when Bapu called him back and said, "You will do well to go there prepared for some unpleasant experience."

Now Ba did not know Ramanarayanbhai well enough. So when he saw her and he asked her for some raisins, Ba, pointing to him, asked Pyarelalji, "Do you know this gentleman? Who is he? He has come to take some raisins from those kept for Bapu's use."

But before Pyarelalji could reply, Ramanarayanbhai, who had already gone

prepared for Ba's plain-spokenness, said, "Ba, I am a newcomer here. I have not been keeping well. So Bapu sent me here to ask you for some raisins, in spite of my own disinclination to do so."

At this Ba's heart melted with sympathy and she replied, "That is all right. I had a goodly stock of raisins before. But now it is almost exhausted, because Bapu gave away much of it to those who were ill. However, I had kept back some for Bapu. But it appears your need is greater. So here are the raisins."

When Ramanarayanji heard that the raisins, intended for Bapu's use, were being given to him, he felt still further disinclined to take them. But Ba persuaded him to accept them and afterwards affectionately began to ask him questions about himself and his family. Then he went back to Bapu. Seeing him smiling, instead of with a sad-looking face, Bapu was rather surprised. However, when he heard the whole story he said, "Well, that is just like Ba. She loses her temper at times, specially whenever anything has to be given away to someone else from anything kept for me. But her heart is like the ocean, full of sympathy. No sooner does she hear of another's suffering than she is all sympathy. Then she forgets even

her overmuch fondness for me and also keen attentiveness to my needs.”

38

**BAPU: “FOR YOU ALSO, BA,
AM I A MAHATMA?”**

In Sevagram once Ba fell ill. Bapu would visit her hut every morning and evening. One evening, however, owing to pressure of work, he could not go to her. Ba took to heart, it appeared, this omission on his part. For, next morning when he asked Ba, “How are you feeling today?” she answered rather angrily, “But you do not seem to care for me at all. And, pray, why should you? Are you not a *Mahatma*? And have you not to care for the whole world? Then why should you have any thought for poor me?”

In reply Bapu only caressed her head in love and laughed and said, “For you also am I a great man and a *Mahatma*?”

This disarmed Ba and her anger disappeared.

BAPU: "BA HAS SIMPLY TO BE OBEYED!"

Once Bapu stayed for some time in Maganwadi, Wardha, to help in placing the work of the newly-started All-India Village Industries Association on a proper footing. Now it was a rule of the community that all the necessary household chares would be done by turn only by the inmates. One day the cleaning of the pots and pans fell to the lot of Bapu and Kumarappaji. However, as soon as Ba came to know of this, she ran up to them and remonstrating said, "Have you two gentlemen no other work to do? You have so many other important things to do; then, why not do them, leaving your present chares to some of the other people?"

But Bapu only laughed and continued doing his chares. This made Ba more angry. So straightaway she wrested the pots from Bapu's hands, leaving only the cocoanut-shell's fibre-mop in his hands!

Whereupon Bapu remarked humorously, "Kumarappa, you are indeed, fortunate. For, you have no wife to rule over you. But for the sake of harmony in the home, I have

simply to obey Ba. So you will please excuse me if I let you have Ba as your partner in doing the present job.”

Bapu then washed his hands and feet and left Ba and Kumarappaji to finish the chares.

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“SHE HAS EVEN BROUGHT ABOUT A QUARREL BETWEEN US!”

In Sabarmati Ashram it was a rule that every inmate should wash his own clothes with the quantity of the soap, allotted to him. But the womenfolk found the budgeted quantity insufficient for their needs. Now if they complained, that would be like protesting against the rule. So they eventually decided upon sending a petition to Bapu, requesting him to increase the soap ration. To this end, they approached Ba, too. She at once signed the petition. When the petition was presented to Bapu, and he saw Ba's name in it, he said, pointing to the sister who headed the deputation that called on him with it, “She has even brought about a quarrel between Ba and me!”

Eventually, however, Bapu sanctioned the increase in the monthly soap ration.

THE BITTER AND THE SWEET

Ba's was the eagle-eye. Whenever she saw in the kitchen anything not in its proper place, or any fruit or vegetable about to decompose, or any edible kept uncovered, she would reprimand the person in charge, setting right, however, at the same time, whatever seemed to her to be amiss. She was always plain-spoken. That is why often a new-comer would not at first take kindly to her. If any one complained about Ba in this respect to Bapu, the latter would say, "Maybe, Ba has something of the bitter in her, but she has also of the sweet in her and that, too, in abundance."

BA'S CONSIDERATENESS

One day, in the Ashram at Sabarmati, at noon, when it was extremely hot, Ba was seen going in the direction of the kitchen. She was in search of Pyarelalji, who had not as yet reached Bapu's room to massage the latter's feet with ghee before he had his mid-day rest, as was his daily practice. On the way

Sushilabehn just asked Ba if there was any particular job to be done at the moment as she seemed to be in such hurry, and if so, she would at once undertake to do it.

“No, Pyarelal would not like to miss the opportunity to massage Bapu. However, please go and find out where he is. But if he is still having his food, then please do not call him.”

43

BAPU'S KHADI MOVEMENT AND BA

In the beginning of the Khadi movement, started by Bapu, the cloth that was spun and woven was not only coarse, but also of short length. The result was that often two pieces had to be sewn up together to make a dhoti or sari. This made the sari particularly heavy and so not easy to carry. Therefore, some women once argued with Bapu to this effect. He replied, “Difficult to carry for you women, who carry a child's weight for nine long months! And, that too, for the sake of the country and to protect the honour of the poor women?”

Then they offered another counter-argument, “But the sari is so heavy that it is difficult to wash it every day.”

At this Bapu laughed and answered, "Well, then we menfolk would wash your saris!"

As the leader of the women, who argued on the point with Bapu, happened to be Ba, he said further, "It took a lot of coaxing on my part to persuade Ba to take to socks and boots in South Africa, and a little less of coaxing when, years afterwards, I tried to dissuade her from using them. But it appears I shall have to do a lot more of cajoling this time to persuade Ba to take to the Khadi sari."

However, shortly afterwards Ba, too, adopted Khadi for her habitual wear.

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BA'S LOVE FOR KHADI

Once Ba hurt one of her toes. So she thought of putting a bandage around it to ensure protection against further harm. However, just as she was about to do so, a sister brought her a bandage, made of fine mill-cloth, saying, "Ba, this will be softer and also it will wear better. So please use it instead of the Khadi bandage."

Ba replied, "No, I will use only the Khadi bandage. And even if it is extremely rough, it will not hurt me."

How strange! For, there was a time, though it was long long ago, when Ba never fancied Khadi. But as in so many other things, she was, out of her abounding love for, and abiding loyalty to, Bapu, in the end, reconciled to the wearing of Khadi.

45

**BAPU : “BUT MY SONS ARE
ALSO YOURS.”**

Once some of the Harijans in Nagpur decided to resort to Satyagraha as a protest against the non-election of a Harijan as President of the Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee. Their plan was to fast and sit still every day for 24 hours in batches of five in Sevagram, in front of Bapu. Ultimately when they arrived in Sevagram, Bapu welcomed them and made every arrangement for their stay in the Ashram. In this connection Bapu asked Ba to vacate one of the two rooms, which she occupied, for the visitors. This involved her giving up her larger room to them and herself staying into the smaller room as a combined living and bath-room. And she felt that she would be rather inconvenienced by this arrangement.

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Therefore, Ba said to Bapu, sarcastically, "They are after all your sons. Why not then offer your own room to them?"

Bapu laughed and rejoined, "But they are as much yours as they are mine!"

Thus Ba was disarmed, and in the end not only she gave up her larger room, but she also attended to every comfort of the visitors!

46

BA — MOTHER OF HARIJANS'

Though it took time to change Ba's orthodox attitude towards the Harijans, yet after persistent persuasion on the part of Bapu, she eventually looked upon them, too, with limitless love and sympathy. So, when Bapu adopted Lakshmibehn, a Harijan girl, as his daughter, Ba showered all her motherly affection on her, as is evident from the following incident.

When Sushilabehn went to the Ashram for the first time in 1930, Lakshmibehn was there. After a few days' stay there Sushilabehn returned home. Incidentally one day, one of her friends asked her cynically, "Did that Harijan girl in the Ashram make friend with you?"

“Which Harijan girl?” queried Sushilabehn, somewhat surprised.

“The one whom Mahatmaji has adopted as his own daughter.”

Only then it was that Sushilabehn realized that Lakshmibehn was a Harijan girl. For, so well, without any sense of discrimination in the least, had Ba been treating Lakshmibehn. In fact, Ba showed special love and considerateness to the workers among the Harijans like Manibai, Khandumama and others, whom she often used to remember even during her detention in the Aga Khan Palace. More, whenever any reference to the Harijans was made in conversation or discussion, Ba would say, “After all, we all have been created by God. Therefore, to have the feeling of being high or low is quite wrong.”

47

BA'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE BRAHMANAS

Ba considered, according to the orthodox notions, Mahadevbhai's sudden death as ominous, as it was the death of a Brahmana. Now among the sentries on duty in the Aga Khan Palace, there was a Brahmana, who cooked food for Ba and Bapu. To him Ba

would often give from her own share, some fruit and milk. This made the other sentries jealous. And so once they complained to the Superintendent of the jail against this special treatment of the sentry concerned. Thereupon the Superintendent asked Ba to discontinue her practice. But she refused saying, "I give the cook out of my own share. What have others to do with that?" She had, indeed, a soft corner for the Brahmanas. Later, one day Ba said to the cook, "You are a Brahmana, so tell us when we shall be released." The poor Brahmana simply answered, "I shall consult the astrological chart and almanac and let you know."

48

BAPU: "TELL THE BEADS OF YOUR GRANDMA'S NAME, KAHANA!"

In 1938, when Ba went to Rajkot to take part in the Satyagraha campaign there, Bapu found it difficult to look after Kahana, their grandson, who was his grandma's pet. So one day he said to Kahana, "Tell the beads of your grandma's name and lo! she will straight-away come and stand before you."

"Give me a rosary then," said the little one.

So Bapu gave a rosary to him and he began to tell its beads. "But the grandma has not as yet come," complained Kahana crying, after a day or two. So Bapu sent him back to his mother.

49

BA'S FONDNESS FOR GAMES

During her detention in the Aga Khan Palace, in Poona, despite her failing health Ba would often watch Sushilabehn, Mirabehn, Manubehn, Dr. Gilder and Pyarelalji and others playing Badminton. And she would pull up the players if any one played any tricks. Once even she and Bapu played a game of Ping-Pong. But when Ba could not return the ball, served by Bapu, all had a hearty laugh. Ba subsequently, too, now and again, played this game, but she had to give it up before long because of asthma.

At night Mirabehn, Dr. Gilder and others would play carom. Ba took interest in this game as well and soon began to play it herself. She and Mirabehn would usually be partners and as Mirabehn was a skilful player, they would usually win the game. However, if any

time they lost the game, Ba would feel somewhat sad. Therefore, the other players secretly decided among themselves to let Ba win eventually every time, so that her sadness may not adversely affect her health. She grew so fond of the game that even during her last grave illness, the carom-board would be taken near her bed and she would watch others playing the game. And whenever Mirabehn won, Ba, who formerly used to be her partner, too, would consider the victory as her own, and whenever Mirabehn lost, *vice versa*.

50

BA: "WE SHALL ALL GO TOGETHER."

In 1931 Ba once went to Vedchhi Ashram. The gentleman in-charge arranged for a cot for her to sit on, as she arrived, and later, when she would attend the meeting to be convened for her. But Ba refused to sit on the cot and, instead, went straight into the kitchen to help in the cooking. Seeing her doing this, the gentleman's wife said to Ba, "Please do not trouble yourself. We shall soon be finishing the cooking."

To this, Ba simply gave the answer, "The more the merrier and quicker the work. When

we have done with the cooking, we shall all go together to the meeting.”

51

BA, THE MOTHER OF ALL

Ba always looked after the *ashramites* like her own children, attending to their needs and working along with them. Sometimes there would be a meeting or some guest would have arrived at the time of the kitchen work. The inmates would be eager to attend it or hear him. So Ba would say to those working in the kitchen, “All of you can go gladly. For, I know how eager you all are to go. I shall finish all that is to be done here. So do go.”

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BA BELIEVED IN SELF-HELP

In 1928, a tannery was set up some distance away from the Sabarmati Ashram. One of the *ashramites* and a few labourers worked and stayed there. One day some dacoits raided the tannery and removed all the contents, belabouring some of the workers in addition. The workers, therefore, refused to stay and work there any longer. Thereupon Bapu decided that the *ashramites* will have to carry on their

various activities without the aid of any outside labour. Accordingly, they went to the dairy the next day to work along with the manager there. Among them was also Ba. The manager, however, hesitated to assign any work to her. Now Ba observed this and so she said to him, "Why do you not give me some work? Is not some fodder to be got ready for the cows?"

"Yes, but..." said the manager hesitatingly.

Thereupon Ba burst into laughter and straightaway started doing the job.

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BA EVER INTENT ON SERVING OTHERS

Once Goshibehn Captain visited the Ashram. One day, after all had finished their dinner, each one, according to the rules of the Ashram, picked up his own plate and pot to clean them. Now Goshibehn, who had never done a job like this before, was somewhat non-plussed. Ba noticed her dismay. So she quietly picked up also Goshibehn's plate and pot and cleaned them, saying, "Sister, you are not used to such things. But for me this is a part of my daily routine. Therefore, it does not mean any additional work for me."

BA WAS ALWAYS DEVOTED TO WORK

Ba believed in being busy all the time, doing the various chores herself. During the five or six years, preceding her death, her health began to give way. So two or three girls always stayed with her in her room to help her. But unless she was absolutely helpless, she would not let them do any of her chores. On the contrary, if on any day any of the girls was late, Ba would do her job, as well. Often Bapu would remonstrate with her for straining herself unnecessarily, but it had no effect on her.

BA'S TEACHING OTHERS BY EXAMPLE

In Sevagram once a girl fell ill. So one of the sisters staying there was appointed specially to look after her. One day, however, the patient's commode had been somehow left unattended to. When Ba went to inquire after the patient she noticed this. So at once she cleaned up the commode quietly, without

saying anything to the person in charge of the patient.

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BA'S ALERTNESS

In 1942, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the passing away of Mahadevbhai, Ba invited thirty prisoners to a feast. Though not at all well, she served semolina (*sheero*) with her own shaking hand to all of them, the other dishes being served by Dr. Gilder, Mira-behn, Sushilabehn, Manubehn and Pyarelalji. As Manubehn went round serving the guests, she inadvertantly forgot to serve one of them. Ba observed this and she immediately pulled her up, admonishing her to be always alert and attentive when serving food to others.

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BA — EVERY ONE'S MOTHER

Two or three days before Ba passed away she asked Dr. Gilder for a dose of castor oil. The doctor, however, dissuaded her from taking it, saying it will make her still weaker. "Let it be so," said Ba, "after all I shall very soon be on the funeral pyre."

“Why do you say like this?” remarked the doctor. “Today your sons, Ramadas and Devadas are coming to see you. Would you not like to meet them?”

At first Ba smiled a little and then told the doctor that for her, all of them were like her own children. So, in the event of her death, any of them, too, could perform the last, rites.

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BA'S PUNCTILIOUSNESS

In 1937 Dr. Sushila Nayar went to Seva-gram to stay with Bapu. One day she took out something from Ba's box and then closed one of the two lockers, leaving the other unattended, as it was somewhat out of action. Ba saw this. So getting up, she closed the other locker. On another occasion after something else had been taken out of the same box, she told Sushilabehn to hand over the box to her, so that she might close it properly. Sushilabehn replied, “I shall do it.” Whereupon Ba said to her teasingly, “But, if you forget?”

BA'S SYMPATHETIC NATURE

In 1942, when Dr. Sushila Nayar was under detention in Poona, she received one day the sad news that her sister-in-law had died, leaving behind her a seven-day old newborn. Therefore, her elder brother and her mother applied to the Government to release her on parole for a few days. But the application was turned down. Hearing this Ba said to Bapu, "I think, Sushila should at this time be with her mother. "But if she goes," replied Bapu, "who will attend on you? You are not well at all."

"I know that I shall be inconvenienced by her going away," rejoined Ba, "but I am not so selfish as not to think of another's sorrow." Later on, she suggested to Sushilabehn to write home at least a letter of sympathy, at the same time explaining the whole situation. But Sushilabehn had sometime earlier informed the Government that she would not correspond with her family, and so had her brother Pyarelal. Accordingly, Ba asked Bapu to persuade both the sister and the brother to write the letter.

Whereupon Bapu said to them, "It is on my advice you informed the Government that you would not write letters home. But in the present situation I feel you should write." This was done and Ba's mind was at rest.

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"NO GOOD AND WISE PERSONS IN SEVAGRAM EXCEPT..."

Often Bapu used to say, "Amongst the people, who have come into contact with Ba and me, more (people) have greater love for, and faith in, Ba than for or in me." That this was true was once corroborated in the following way. Once Shri Ghanashyamdas Birla went to Sevagram to meet Naraharibhai Parikh. While talking to Naraharibhai, he said jokingly, "In your Ashram here, I think, almost all of you are a little off your head."

"Even Bapu?" asked Naraharibhai somewhat in surprise.

Shri Birla replied, "Of course, he heads the list here. I cannot say, of course, anything about the inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram. But in Sevagram, barring Ba and Durgabehn, I do not see any other good and wise person."

BA, AN IMAGE OF NON-VIOLENT COURAGE

In the course of the Bardoli struggle in 1932, Ba was arrested and awarded 'C' class. Referring to this, Mr. Polak had some very harsh things to say about the Government's inhumanity in the *Leader*. Such strong writing, however, was rather unusual for him. In this connection Bapu recalled that, years back it was Ba's arrest in South Africa, which had made Sir Pherozeshah Mehta roar in indignation in the Town Hall, in Bombay. "Something similar has now happened to our friend, Polak," he added. Thereupon Vallabhbhai remarked, "Truly, Ba is an image of non-violence. I have not seen any other woman like her. She is so humble, natural and easy in her ways, that one is simply amazed at Government's treating her so severely."

Bapu rejoined, "That is but true. But personally I consider Ba's courage to be her greatest attribute. And she has shown it steadfastly from the days of the South African struggle till this day, even though at times like all human beings she is angry and envious."

SELF-RESPECTING BA

When Bapu was practising as a lawyer in Johannesburg in South Africa, one day some European friends of Mr. Polak, who at the time was staying along with Mrs. Polak under the same roof with Bapu, came to dinner. Bapu did not know them, however, well enough, but Ba did not know them at all. Now the guests asked Bapu, in course of conversation, all sorts of curious questions, some of which were even rather unbecoming. But he replied to them simply and quietly, though at some of them, particularly at those relating to their wrong impressions about India and the Indians, he laughed heartily, too, because they were so foolish. But Ba could not stand the guests, as occasionally they asked even personal questions. So she went upstairs in a huff. Bapu thought this was showing discourtesy to the guests. Therefore, he went up to plead with Ba to come down, but in vain. Bapu offered, however, some sort of explanation to the guests for Ba's absence from the table and they took their dinner. But next

day when Mrs. Polak inquired of Ba as to why she was not present at the dinner, she answered in her halting English “(Guests) to make laugh of me and my home”, meaning that the guests had the audacity to laugh at some of *their* manners and even ask some personal questions. This, she continued, she could not tolerate, and so she went away.

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**BA: “EVERYDAY BAPU IS UP TO
SOME MISCHIEF!”**

During 1922-24, when Bapu was in Yeravda jail, Poona, once he asked the Superintendent to do something for a prisoner, but he was refused. So, in protest, he resolved thereafter to subsist only on milk. This he did for four weeks. Consequently, Bapu’s weight went down to 90 pounds from 104. One day Ba and a few others visited Bapu. As Bapu climbed the stairs, Ba noticed that his feet were rather unsteady. Accordingly, she asked him the reason thereof. Knowing this, they all requested him to take to fruit, instead, and he agreed. The Superintendent, thereupon, as if in self-defence said, “I am not at all to blame in all that Mr. Gandhi has been doing.” Ba, who

had known Bapu's ways in such matters for many years, answered in her broken English, "Yes, yes, I know my husband. He always mischief!"

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BA: "BAPU DESERVES IT!"

On one occasion Mr. Polak was a little angry with Bapu over something. So he went about the house looking somewhat disconsolate. Ba observed this. She, therefore, said to Mrs. Polak in her broken English, — a smattering knowledge of which she had picked up in South Africa, where most of those who came into the house spoke English, "What the matter Mr. Polak? What for he cross?"

Mrs. Polak told Ba the cause of her husband's annoyance.

"What for he cross Bapu? What Bapu done?" inquired Ba.

Then Mrs. Polak related to Ba what had happened.

But Ba only exclaimed, "Oh, oh!" It seemed she was inwardly enjoying the fact that there was also some one else, beside her, who could be annoyed with Bapu.

BA'S USE OF ENGLISH

Once Bapu and Ba were staying as guests of the Nawab of Bhopal. One day Ba needed some honey for Bapu. So she just asked the officer-in-waiting, "Do you know Hindi?" He replied, "No, please." Evidently he mistook Hindi, which term Ba had used in the sense of Hindustani, to mean some highly Sanskritized language. Then she inquired if he knew English, to which he answered in the affirmative. Whereupon Ba trotted out her smattering knowledge of English, "Bees, flowers, honey."

The officer-in-waiting understood what Ba meant and at once fetched a bottle of honey.

BA LEARNS HOW TO WRITE ENGLISH AT THE AGE OF SIXTY!

In 1930, when she was in jail, Ba learnt that one of her fellow-prisoners knew English. So she started learning English from her, in spite of the fact that she was then nearly sixty years old. She spent days and days on learning how to write the alphabets. She never showed any lack of interest or enthusiasm or any inferiority complex in doing so. For, she had

only one ambition, namely, to be able to write Bapu's address herself, whenever she wrote a letter to him, rather than depend on some one else for the purpose, and also to pick out the letters addressed to her, from among the heavy post, received daily for Bapu.

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BA'S CHILD-LIKE SIMPLICITY

In 1939 Bapu went to Cuttack to attend a meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh. The temple of Jagannath, in Puri, being not very far from there, Ba, Durgabehn and some others who, too, had gone there, went one day on pilgrimage to Puri, and returned to Cuttack in the evening. When Bapu heard of this he felt greatly annoyed and pained as well, saying, "How can we ever enter a temple, which is not open to the Harijans?"

Later on, while out on his evening walk, Bapu spoke to Ba on the subject. Simple like a child, she at once acknowledged that it was a lapse on her part and asked for his forgiveness.

Bapu's anger vanished and he said, "No, I am at fault. Though I have been your teacher, I have left your education unfinished. So you are not at all to blame."

Referring to the incident some time afterwards, Bapu remarked to Mahadevbhai, “Ba’s owning up her mistake so readily simply held me spell-bound!”

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BA, INNOCENT AS A CHILD!

In 1943, after Bapu had broken his fast on March 3, one day, seeing an advertisement of the picture, “Bharat-Milap” in the newspaper, Ba and Sushilabehn began to talk about the cinema. Whereupon Sushilabehn suggested that when next they happen to be in New Delhi, they would go to see the picture, taking also Devadasbhai’s children Tara, Ramu and others with them. “But if Bapu does not see it, how could I?” asked Ba. Sushilabehn answered, “Even then, the picture being religious, Bapu will not object to your going there.”

Hearing her grandchildren’s names, a smile flitted across her face and she simply said, “All right, then.”

BA, EVER CURIOUS AS A CHILD

Whenever Ba heard or read anything new, she was always eager to talk about it to others. During her detention in 1942, once she read the history of the Parsis. So one day when the Parsi Superintendent of the jail, Mr. Kateli, visited her, she asked, "Mr. Kateli, do you know how the Parsis came out to India?"

Mr. Kateli, a gentleman, every inch of him, straightaway sat down and listened to Ba enthusiastically, even though he knew the story. For, at the moment, Ba reminded him of his own dear mother.

BAPU'S MOTHER!

In South Africa, during the Satyagraha struggle, once on a railway station, a European, who knew Bapu, seeing Ba, who had been arrested and was far from well at the time, in his company, asked Bapu, "Mr. Gandhi, is she your mother?"

Thereupon Bapu burst into loud laughter.

HOW BAPU LOOKED UPON BA

Once when Bapu went along with Ba to Ceylon, some people there mistook her to be his mother! Even the gentleman, who accorded them welcome on behalf of the public, thought so and introduced Ba to the audience at a meeting as such. Then, turning to Bapu, he asked, "Why did you not bring Kasturba along?"

Bapu replied, in the course of his speech, "The gentleman, who just introduced me to you, has made a small error. The lady, who is with me here, is not my mother, as he has told you, but my wife. But in one sense he is correct. For, it is years since, by mutual understanding and agreement, she ceased to be my wife and I, her husband. I have ever since then looked upon her as my mother. If men and women were to understand the meaning of all this, they would, I believe, be really happy. For, life has been given to us, not for our own enjoyment, but for the service of our fellow-beings."

THE PITEOUS CRY OF A MOTHER'S HEART

Ba and Bapu's eldest son, Harilalbhai, had unfortunately taken to undesirable ways in life and, subsequently, also turned a Muslim. Therefore, the parents were always greatly concerned about his well-being. Often Bapu would blame himself for all these doings of his first-born, saying that the latter was not only born, when Bapu was under the influence of certain delusions, but that he (the son) had also been a witness to several dubious things he (Bapu) did and said when he grew up. All these had left an indelible impression on Harilalbhai's impressionable mind. But Ba's motherly heart suffered great agony. And she gave expression to it once in a very moving letter to him. She said:

“Dear Son, Harilal,

I heard lately that some time back for some disorderly behaviour at midnight, you were hauled up before a Magistrate in Madras, and he fined you, though only one rupee. This shows that

the Magistrate was merciful to you and had also regard for your father. But I have been deeply pained by what you did. I do not know if you were alone at the time, or you had some friends, too, then with you. I do not know what to say to you. For years I have been pleading with you to lead a good life, but you have gone from bad to worse. Alas! we, your father and I, have to suffer so much on your account in the evening of our life. What a pity that you, our eldest son, have turned our enemy! But what has grieved me greatly is your criticism of your father, in which you have been indulging nowadays. Of course, he remains silent and calm. Only if you knew how his heart is always full of love for you. That is why he has again and again offered to keep you with him and me, and cater, too, to your creature comforts; but only on the condition that you mend your present ways. But you are so ungrateful. Your father is no doubt bearing it all so bravely. But I am an old, weak woman, who finds it difficult to suffer patiently the mental torture, caused by your regrettable way of life. I cannot move about with ease among friends and all

those who know us. Your father has always forgiven you, but God will never. Every morning I open the daily newspaper in fear, lest it might have some further report of your evil doings. And often when I have sleepless nights, I think of you and wonder where you are these days, what you are eating, where you are staying, etc. Sometime I even long ardently to meet you. But I do not know your whereabouts. But even if any time I chanced to meet you, I am afraid you might insult me.

Further, I fail to understand why you have changed your ancestral religion. However, that is your own personal affair. But why should you lead astray the simple and the innocent who, perhaps, out of regard for your father, are inclined to follow you? You consider only those people as your friends, who give you money for drink. And what is worse, you even ask the people from the platform to walk in your footsteps. This is a self-deception at its worst. But you cannot mislead the people for long. So I beseech you to mend your ways calmly and courageously. When you accepted Islam, you wrote to

me, you did so to make yourself better. And, willy-nilly, I reconciled myself to it. But some of your old friends, who saw you recently in Bombay, tell me that your present condition is worse than before.”

Ba also addressed a letter to some of the Muslim friends, who were known to be egging on Harilalbhai in his undesirable doings. In the course of it she said:

“I fail to understand the keen interest you have been taking in my eldest son’s life. You should, on the contrary, take him to task for bringing discredit to your religion. But, instead, you have begun to address him as *Maulvi* and show undue respect to him whenever you go to the station to see him off! Maybe, you want to make his father and mother a laughing-stock of the world. In that case, I have nothing to say to you, except that what you are doing is highly reprehensible in the eyes of God. I am writing this in the hope that the piteous cry of this sorrowing mother will pierce the heart of at least one of you and you will help my son turn a new leaf. In the meantime, my only comfort lies in the knowledge that we have several lifelong Muslim friends, who highly

disapprove of our son's doings. How I wish our good friend, Dr. Ansari, were living at this hour! He would have given wise counsel to our son."

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TOUCHING MEETING OF BA AND HARILALBHAI

Once Ba and Bapu were travelling by Jabalpur Mail. When the train reached Katni, they heard some one cry out, "Victory to Mother Kasturba!" This was something unusual, for on railway stations and elsewhere they had generally heard the cry, "Victory to Gandhiji". So Ba just looked out of the window in curiosity. And lo! there was Harilalbhai, looking very poorly in health, with all his teeth gone and his clothes in rags. Just then Harilalbhai went up and, taking an orange out of his pocket, said to Ba, "Ba, this is for you." Whereupon Bapu asked, "And you have nothing for me?"

Harilalbhai answered, "No, I have brought this orange only for Ba. To you, I have only to say this: If you are so great, it is because of Ba."

Bapu rejoined, "Of course, it is so. But, first, tell me, are you coming along with us?"

Harilalbhai said, "No, I came up only to meet Ba."

Then he offered the orange to Ba, saying it was just a token of his love for her, even though he had to beg for it, and insisted on her taking it alone. And as she began to eat the orange, she said to him sorrowfully, "Look at your present condition, son. Come along with us. Do you realize whose son you are? But, perhaps, now your condition is beyond any improvement." Tears welled up in her eyes. And as the train steamed out she heard Harilalbhai say, "Ba, do eat the orange."

Suddenly Ba remembered that they had not given anything to Harilalbhai. So at once she took out some fruit from the basket to give it to Harilalbhai, but he was far away. The train was already in motion. From a distance once again, however, the cry was heard, "Victory to Mother Kasturba!"

BA'S MOTHER-HEART

Though Harilalbai, the eldest son, often acted against the wishes of his father, still Ba had a soft corner for him and continued to feel concerned about him. For, as a Sanskrit saying* goes, "A son may be bad some time, but a mother can never be bad." Even during her last serious illness the Government allowed Harilalbai to interview her. This made her very happy, indeed. But when Ba learnt that he was to be allowed only once to see her, she was greatly displeased. So she said to Bapu with touching emotion, "What is this? Devadas is allowed to see me daily, but Harilal only once? Well, when I see the Jail Superintendent Bhandari, I shall ask him why this difference. Why should not poor Harilal be permitted to meet me daily?"

Bapu pacified her, saying, "I shall try to obtain such permission for him."

But, later on, when Bapu made inquiries about Harilalbai, the latter had already gone away and he could not know anything further about his whereabouts.

*कुपुत्रो जायेत क्वचिदपि कुमाता न भवति ।

BA IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF BAPU

During the 1930 struggle for freedom, after Bapu was arrested in Karadi, Ba continued his campaign and went about from village to village. This tired her out completely. So she went, along with Vanamalabehn to Maroli Ashram for rest. One morning after prayers, just as they were sitting down to breakfast, a telegram was received from Borsad, saying that Ba's presence was urgently required there. For, as a result of the no-tax campaign of the peasants, propagated by some of the women volunteers, the latter had been beaten mercilessly by the police. This had roused the indignation of the people. So Ba was called to sustain the peasants in the struggle. Accordingly, without even taking her breakfast, she began to pack up to go to the railway station to catch the first train to Borsad. But Vanamalabehn dissuaded her in view of her feeble health, and, instead, offered herself to step into the breach. Ba, however, did not pay any heed to her appeal and went immediately to Borsad. On arrival there, she first visited the wounded

in the hospital, then she went about among the people. The doctors, seeing the strain on her, advised her rest. But she refused, saying, "In Bapu's absence I must stand by the people."

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BAPU'S WISH WAS BA'S WISH

On August 9, 1942, very early in the morning, a police officer came to arrest Bapu, Mahadevbhai and Mirabehn. Turning to Ba, who also happened to be there with them at the time, he said, "If you wish to join them, you can."

Hearing this, Bapu told Ba that if she felt she could not stay back, she could go along with them. But, he added, that his own wish was that she should keep out and, instead, continue his work.

The hint was enough for Ba. So she made up her mind then and there to carry on the struggle for freedom.

BAPU'S INSISTENCE ON STRICT OBSERVANCE OF RULES

In 1939, during the Satyagraha in Rajkot, Ba was interned in a small village nearby, just before Bapu was arrested. The atmosphere and climate there were far from satisfactory. This affected her health so badly that in keeping her so far away, there was great risk to her life. Though she never complained of her suffering to any one, not even to Bapu, the public somehow got the scent of it, and, consequently, they agitated for her being shifted to some other place. At last the State Government shifted Ba to another village, about 10 to 15 miles off Rajkot. Along with her at the time there were Manibehn Patel and Mridulabehn Sarabhai. Even here, however, Ba did not keep well. But she never cared for herself, all the time being concerned about Bapu's health and the well-being of Ramadasbhai's son, Kahana.

Now once Bapu visited Ba in her internment. He found her looking extremely weak and pale, even though the Government had

provided her with various kinds of comforts and conveniences. But the fact of the matter was that she was feeling keenly her separation from Bapu.

Then, all of a sudden, Bapu entered on a fast. This was a great shock to Ba and others. So she said to Sushilabehn, who had conveyed the disturbing news to her, "You should have at least told me betimes that Bapu was contemplating a fast."

Sushilabehn answered, "But, Ba, none of us had any previous inkling of what was coming."

Presently, Ba called the maid, who cooked food for her, and told her that during the period of Bapu's fast she would have only fruit and that, too, only once during the day. It may be stated here that this was her usual practice whenever Bapu went on a fast.

Now two or three days after the fast had begun, Ba came one day and stood before Bapu! Whereupon Bapu asked her, "How have you come up here?"

Ba replied that the Government had told her that if she wished to see Bapu, she could.

However, when till nightfall nobody came there to take back Ba to her place of internment,—presumably, because the Government

thought of setting her free in this way—Bapu said, “If the Government wishes to release you, then they should release Manibehn and Mridulabehn and others as well, and also in a proper manner.”

After waiting in vain for an escort till 1 a.m., Bapu sent Ba back. Then some one told him that at that late hour the road would be closed. Further, nobody would let her in without a pass, and so they might even stop her on the way. “If they do this,” Bapu said to Ba, “then offer Satyagraha and lie down on the road, even if you have to be there the whole night.”

Thereupon Ba went away, though she did not at all like to leave Bapu alone. However, no one stopped her on the way and she reached her place of internment. Subsequently, in compliance with Bapu’s letter, the Government set Ba and others free in the proper manner. Ba at once went back to Bapu and engaged herself in his service, absolutely unmindful of her own needs.

BA ALONE COULD STAND BAPU

On August 9, 1942, after Bapu had been arrested in the morning, Ba and Sushilabehn also were arrested later in the evening and taken to Arthur Road Prison in Bombay. The room, in which Ba was lodged, was ill-ventilated and damp. Furthermore, the lavatory was stinking, because it had gone out of action.

Suddenly Ba had an attack of dysentery. This made her very weak. Maybe, the sudden arrest of Bapu and others was also weighing heavily on her mind. Then she began to have temperature, too. Therefore, both she and Sushilabehn were removed to the Aga Khan Palace, in Poona.

By the time the train reached Poona, Ba had become extremely feeble, because of the continued dysentery. To help her alight from the train, a chair was placed on the platform near the compartment, in which she had travelled. But Ba refused to use it and walked down the platform.

When Bapu saw Ba standing in front of him he wondered, at first, whether, not being

able to bear her separation from him, she had forgotten her duty and come there. So he asked her, "Did you apply to the Government to keep you near me? Or did the Government send you here on its own?"

Ba remained silent for some time, not knowing what exactly Bapu had implied in his query.

Whereupon Sushilabehn informed Bapu that it was the Government, who had transferred her from Bombay to Poona. Ba then understood what Bapu meant and so forthwith said, "No, no, I did not make the request to be brought here. It is the Government which sent me up here."

This gave great satisfaction to Bapu.

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**BA : "BAPU'S OBSTINATE NATURE?
WELL, I KNOW IT TOO WELL."**

One day, talking of Bapu's obstinate nature, Ba said, "Bapu's obstinate nature? Well, the less one talks about it, the better. He must have always his own way. Once, in Johannesburg, when he returned home and found me still working in the kitchen, because

the dinner was not as yet quite ready, he asked why it was so. He further added that at the appointed time the fire in the oven should have been put out. However, not being satisfied with saying this, he straightaway poured water over the oven and I was constrained to stop cooking. Bapu cannot brook even a single moment's delay when any job has to be completed. Nor can he tolerate a speck of dirt or a stain anywhere. One has, therefore, to be always on the alert."

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BA'S LIFE-COMPANION

In 1933 Bapu undertook a fast for the purpose of self-purification. Naturally, therefore, Ba felt, as usual, greatly concerned about his health. So Mirabehn, referring to this, wrote in a letter to Bapu, "Only today we have learnt of your impending fast. Ba is, therefore, feeling very anxious about you. She feels the fast is not at all called for. But she knows you will never listen to her. So all that she can do is to pray to God that your fast may be completed without any untoward happening." To this Bapu replied, "Please tell Ba that her

father has given her a life-companion, who could crush down any woman. However, I am constantly trying to win her love.”

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“DID YOU SEE THE RESULT?”

Once Bapu visited Aligarh. One day a friend insisted on straining the milk and serving it to Bapu, instead of letting Ba, who always took every possible care about Bapu's food, do it. Now just when Bapu was on the point of drinking the milk, he noticed a hair in it. Whereupon he inquired how this had come about. Ba then told him the whole story. Bapu burst out, “You see the result?” And he refused to take the milk. This caused intense anguish to Ba who, with tears in her eyes, spoke out, “If someone is disallowed, his feelings are wounded; and if allowed, he, being inexperienced, cannot do the job properly. Bapu has to engage himself day and night in serious problems and yet alas, he refuses to take milk and starves himself!” However, thereafter she resolved to be still more attentive in doing her assignment.

BAPU: "WELL, BA WAS UNIQUE."

After Ba's death, one day, while taking milk, Bapu observed a hair in it. At once he removed it and drank the milk. Some one noticed this and so asked Bapu, "When Ba was alive, you used to take her to task severely if any time a hair or anything else managed to fall into the milk. Nay, you even refused point-blank to take the milk. But today your behaviour is so different."

Bapu answered with almost a pang in his heart, "Well, Ba was unique and in a class by herself."

BA : "I SHALL GO AFTER BAPU HAS FINISHED TAKING HIS FOOD."

During her last serious illness, one day, lying on her bed in the verandah, Ba was watching Bapu take his food. When it was time to take her inside into her room, Mirabehn arrived there, with the wheeled arm-chair, and said to Ba, "Let us go in."

Ba answered quietly, "Please wait a while. Let Bapu finish his food. Then we shall go in."

Such was Ba's constant and keen concern about Bapu's food and his other creature-comforts.

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BA'S AFFECTIONATE CARE OF BAPU TILL THE LAST

All through her life always Ba paid great heed to the smallest detail to Bapu's food,—the extreme cleanliness of the utensils used, the proper preparation of bread, vegetables, etc. Even during her last serious illness, just a few days before her death, one day she said to Manubehn, "Bapu's bottle for molasses is now empty. Have you got more of it ready?"

Manubehn replied, "Yes, grandma, it is on fire and will soon be liquefied, when I shall pour it into the bottle."

Ba rejoined, "But if you want any immediately, I have plenty of it."

**BAPU : “BA IS ALWAYS
SITTING HERE.”**

A few days after Ba's death, one day Bapu's morning meal was served to him at 11-45 a.m. instead of at 11-30 a.m., his scheduled time for it. Therefore, he said to the sister, who brought in the food, "We should all think that Ba is always sitting here. You know how she never served me food late, even by one minute. And if, being engaged elsewhere at the time, she entrusted the job to someone else, she saw to it that he also observed strict punctuality. And if by any chance he did not, she would reprimand the person concerned. Even during her last serious illness in the Aga Khan Palace, when she could not do any work herself, she always kept her eyes on the watch and had my food served up at the appointed hour. One day I just said to her, 'Here I have not to keep to time. So what does it matter if sometime there is some delay?' She at once answered, 'But I know that you always keep to time, even here. So why should there be any delay in the matter of attending to your personal needs?'"

BAPU : "I KNOW BA BETTER."

During 1942, when Bapu was thinking of undertaking a fast, Sarojini Devi, Sushilabehn and Pyarelalji and others felt that if he did ultimately resort to it, the ordeal would be too much for Ba to bear, because of her extreme physical weakness. So one day Sarojini Devi, who often thought that Bapu was at times very hard upon poor Ba, blurted out, "Bapu, these fasts of yours will simply kill Ba."

Thereupon Bapu laughed and said, "I know Ba better than you all. You people have no idea at all of her fortitude. When some years back, I embarked upon the fast to prevent the secession of the Harijans from the fold of Hinduism, and when there seemed to be no hope that I would survive, Ba distributed, at my wish, all my belongings among the hospital staff, without shedding a single tear."

That night, however, Bapu talked to Ba about his contemplated fast and convinced her of the rightness of his step. Therefore, next day Ba said to Sarojini Devi and others that

Bapu had, indeed, no alternative but to fast in protest against the Government's false propaganda. And every one was surprised at her courageous acceptance of the inevitable.

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A HOLY SIGHT

A few days before her death, Ba's health suddenly seemed to take a turn for the better, as a result of the Ayurvedic treatment. But, ultimately it turned out to be a make-believe. However, one day Ba went in her wheeled chair to Mirabehn's room, where there was an image of the child Krishna. Bapu, who was at that time on his walk downstairs, observed this. He straightaway went upstairs. And, lo! there was Ba rapt in prayer! After some time when she opened her eyes and saw Bapu standing there, she smiled and teasingly said to Bapu, "What are you doing here? Please go and continue your walk." Whereupon Bapu smiled and resumed his walk.

A SACRED MEMORY

Before Bapu set out on his historic Dandi March, one day, when he was returning to his room from the Red Bungalow, near Sabar-mati Ashram, after attending a marriage ceremony there, Premabehn Katak, out of curiosity and in a lighter vein, asked, "Mahatmaji, seeing the wedding ceremony, did you recall your own?"

Thereupon Bapu, whose marriage had taken place when he was quite young, laughed and said, "Who could ever forget his own wedding ceremony? So I remember quite vividly till this day how, when the priest was conducting the ceremony, whenever Ba and I had an opportunity to press each other's hand, we did it so lovingly and long!"

“IF BA WOULD NOT EAT IT, I WILL.”

During her last illness one day Ba said to Manubehn, “Make some sweet bread to-day. I would like to eat it. Ask Bapu if he, too, would do so.” It may be, incidentally, stated here that Ba herself was an expert cook and she was very fond of inviting others to partake of her delicacies. But ever since Bapu took a vow not to cultivate or have any special tastes in food, her culinary art had been sadly neglected. Accordingly, Manubehn went up to Bapu and asked him if he would take sweet bread. Knowing that if Ba took the sweet bread, which is rather difficult to digest, it might have an adverse effect on her weak heart, he tactfully answered, “If Ba would not eat it, I will.” Ba took the gentle hint and abstained, but all others enjoyed the special dish.

BA'S MAHADEV

The sudden death of Mahadevbhai in the Aga Khan Palace, on August 15, 1942, was verily a bolt from the blue, particularly for Ba. So great was her sorrow that, in spite of her participating in the prayers for the peace of the soul of the dear departed with fortitude, her tears did not cease for a long time. When the dead body was removed from the Palace for being cremated, she sat in a chair, a little away from the funeral pyre, and attended the last rites till the very end, even though she was extremely weak at the time. All through, with folded hands, she went on praying, "Mahadev, wherever you be, may you be always happy. You rendered such invaluable service to Bapu." Now and again, however, she also cried out, "Why did Mahadev go away? Why not I? What kind of divine justice is this?" After the cremation all the mourners returned to their rooms. But Ba felt all the while that Mahadev's death was, indeed, ominous. "Yes, for the Government," commented Bapu.

This feeling of Ba persisted for days. So one day she said to Sushilabehn, "I think we

are all to blame for Mahadev's death. Bapu started the 'Quit India' campaign and we all, including Mahadev, were clapped into jail. And now he is gone! I cannot help, therefore, thinking that we have committed a sin."

Sushilabehn replied, "Ba, why do you say so? Mahadevbhai has made a supreme sacrifice for the freedom of the country. It cannot be, therefore, called a sin. And if there is any, it will be on the head of the Government. For, Bapu had not even begun the campaign when they arrested him."

Ba rejoined, "That is true, because Bapu was still trying for some kind of a compromise with the Government. But the latter did not give him any chance for a settlement."

From 15th August 1942 onward, a third shrine for offering worship was added to Ba's already two shrines — the *Tulsi* plant and the image of the child Krishna in Mirabehn's room — namely, the *samadhi* of Mahadevbhai. There, too, she prayed and offered flowers regularly.

Later on, on October 2, was Bapu's birthday. So when Sarojini Devi suggested a small festival of earthen lamps to celebrate the happy occasion, Ba said to Sushilabehn, "Do not forget to light a lamp in front of Shankar."

At first Sushilabehn did not quite understand what Ba meant. But presently she realized what was implied and replied, "You mean, that I should also light a lamp at Mahadevbhai's *samadhi*?"

"Yes," answered Ba with deep emotion, "Yes, Mahadev's *samadhi* is for me Shankar's temple."

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74-YEAR-OLD STUDENT BA!

After Mahadevbhai's death the atmosphere in the Aga Khan Palace became very sad, indeed. So Bapu suggested to all the members of his party that each one of them should so draw up his daily programme that his mind would be kept fully and healthily occupied. For, he added, that in the world full of *himsa*, Ahimsa can find its proper place and purpose only in this way.

Bapu himself, of course, kept busy from morning to evening. However, he drew up a programme of work for everyone else of the party, including that for Ba. Accordingly, he started to teach Ba, the Gita, Gujarati, Geography and History. Also before his midday rest, he would read out something to her.

Ba, too, took great interest in her studies. But at her age it was rather difficult for her to learn. Often when Bapu would ask her some questions on the previous day's lesson, it was found that she had completely forgotten it. Once Bapu taught her the names of the rivers in the Punjab. But she could not remember them. So, after Bapu had retired for his siesta, she went up to Sushilabehn and asked her to write down the names of the rivers to help her remember them. Sometimes Bapu would teach Ba the names of important cities in different provinces of India and Ba, too, would make a special effort to remember them. But next day it was the same story over again. Ba had forgotten the lesson and she would say, "Lahore is the capital of Calcutta!" Later on, Bapu interested Ba in Natural Geography and told her several facts in this field with the aid of an orange, which he would order out for the purpose after his midday meal.

After some days, however, Pyarelalji also began to teach the same subject to Manubehn, and now and again Ba would overhear him. However, not being quite familiar with the Hindi equivalents of the English terms, he sometimes used one term for another and Ba, discovering this error, would rejoice, thus

showing that she had learnt well her lessons from Bapu.

In addition, Bapu began teaching the fifth Gujarati primer to Ba. Whenever there was a poem to be studied, he would also teach her how to recite it and then afterwards, both of them would recite the poem. Now one day Sarojini Devi chanced to see this. So she said jokingly, "What are you two up to in your old age?" Whereupon Bapu had a hearty laugh, but after a brief pause, they resumed the recitation.

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HOW COULD BA EVER BEAR IT!

On the solemn occasion of the first anniversary of the passing away of Mahadevbhai, in the morning, as usual, Bapu and party went to his *samadhi* and said their prayers and recited the Gita. But Ba, being very ill, could not go along with them and Manubehn was asked to stay behind with her. Whereupon Ba told Manubehn that if she did not join the others that day specially, she (Ba) would not feel quite happy. "So you too had better go there," added Ba, "and after bowing and

placing the flowers on the *samadhi* and reciting the Gita, you can return here straightaway.” She assured Manubehn that in the meantime nothing would happen to her. But Manubehn protested, “But, Ba, Dr. Gilder and Sushilabehn have instructed us that some one by turn ought always to be with you today. However, after they have come back from the *samadhi*, I shall go there and do the needful, as desired.”

Ba rejoined, “But you can tell them that you have gone there at my bidding.”

Accordingly, Manubehn went to the *samadhi* and joined Bapu and party in their ritual of remembrance of Mahadevbhai. When Bapu noticed her after the prayers, he said to her, “So you came up here after all. I am sure Ba sent you. Such is her nature. For, indeed, how could she bear that on this solemn occasion, you should not be present at the *samadhi*? This only shows that Ba’s sorrow at Mahadev’s going away has not as yet been healed.”

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

During 1942, in August, when Bapu and the other leaders of the nation were arrested all of a sudden, at the same time, Ba felt deeply sad. So while sitting in the waiting-room of the railway station in Bombay, in order to be taken to Yeravda jail to keep company with Gandhiji, she said feelingly to Dr. Sushilabehn Nayar, who was to be her fellow-companion, "Sushila, do you not hear the voices of the people outside? It appears as if nothing has happened at all. The country seems to be going on as before. If it is so apathetic how will Bapu be able to achieve Swaraj?"

With tears streaming from her eyes Sushilabehn replied, "Ba, but God is there to help Bapu. So in the end, all will be well."

BA'S FAITH IN BAPU

During his detention in the Aga Khan Palace, one day Sushilabehn asked Bapu to tell them the story of his own life, rather than tell them some other stories, as he had done a few times on being requested by Manubehn. So Bapu began to relate his autobiography. Talking one day of how Ba had overcome her orthodox views and ways, he said, "In this she received considerable help from the other women members of the family. They all brought home to her repeatedly that her first and foremost duty was to follow her husband. In doing so, they argued, even if some of the traditional observances were infringed she would incur no sin. I must say that as Ba gave me her heart, her head followed gradually in its wake. Thus, she has taken part in all my activities intelligently and enthusiastically."

BAPU'S FAITH IN BA

When Bapu launched his anti-untouchability campaign he argued for days with Ba about taking the Harijans into the Ashram, and eventually also admitting them into the kitchen, but to no purpose. At last one day, he remarked, "Alas! I have failed to carry conviction to Ba." But no sooner had he said this than, as it were, out of the depths of his being he added, "Notwithstanding, if I had to choose a companion for myself life after life, I would choose only Ba."

BAPU : "BA, I DO NOT LOOK UPON YOU AS A DOLL OF CLAY."

It was Ba's practice that whenever Bapu went out of the Ashram or to prison she would touch his feet, and Bapu, on his part, would lovingly place his hand on her head. Once, however, under pressure of work, he forgot to do so. So in a letter Ba complained to him about this lapse. Bapu answered, "I, too,

thought of this oversight, no sooner had the motor car, carrying me, sped away and you were then quite far. But do you still need such outside tokens of my abiding affection for you? Believe me, my love for you is growing deeper day by day, that is, becoming purer and purer. You are not a doll of clay. What more shall I write?"

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**BA : "I WANT TO DIE IN YOUR
LAP, BAPU."**

When first Bapu announced that he would keep some Harijans in the Ashram, Ba, being still orthodox in such matters, did not quite approve of this. And Bapu pleaded with her in vain. So one day Bapu, seeing that Ba was feeling greatly troubled in her mind at his decision, said to her, "If you feel ill at ease here, you can go to my sister Raliyatba, and stay with her. I shall send you seven rupees for your upkeep every month."

Whereupon Ba burst out, "Do you wish in this way to keep me away from you all my life? But I will never stay away from you. For, my one wish is to die in your lap."

**BA: "IF I AM SEPARATED AFTER
ALL THESE YEARS"**

During January 1942 Ba and Bapu stayed for sometime in the Ashram in Bardoli. From there Ba went to the Ashram in Maroli to spend a few days with Mithubehn Petit. There she had fever, which made her still weaker, her heart being already feeble for some years past. Notwithstanding, she went back to Bardoli to rejoin Bapu on his return to Sevagram. Coming to know of her arrival, Bapu forthwith went with a car to receive her. He put her up in the room, occupied downstairs by Sardar Patel, so that she might be spared the strain of going upstairs. Bapu was always solicitous about her well-being, and whenever Ba went out of the Ashram or came back, however busy he might be, he would make it a point to accompany her to the gate and bid her good-bye, or welcome her at the gate.

Looking at Ba's weak condition the Sardar just remarked casually to Kalyanjibhai that it would have been better if she had stayed on in the Maroli Ashram in the interest of her health.

Kalyanjibhai replied, "But she would not. She feared the railway traffic might be dislocated and, consequently, she might be separated from Bapu—a contingency to which she could not reconcile herself. For, she added, she would like to die in Bapu's lap."

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BA'S PREMONITION

When the All-India Congress Committee met in Bombay during August 1942, Ba went there with Bapu from Wardha. As the train steamed out of the platform, several inmates of the Sevagram Ashram, who had forgathered there to bid good-bye to both Ba and Bapu, said to Ba, "Please come back soon."

As if her heart foreboded some ill, Ba replied, "If in response to your good wishes, I do come back to Sevagram, it will be, indeed a great joy."

Later on, after Mahadevbhai passed away, she remarked again and again, "Why did Mahadev go away? It was I who ought to have gone."

Again, when Bapu embarked on a fast in the Aga Khan Palace, and a number of the

Ashramites visited him to enquire after his health, Ba said to them, “Do not feel anxious. Bapu will certainly be up and doing again. But I shall never leave this place alive. I shall precede him in departing from this world. I shall go the way of Mahadev, this place is Mahadev’s temple.”

After Bapu’s fast was over, Ba once again told all those *Ashramites*, who had come there to meet Bapu, “Good-bye! This is our last meeting.” She said the same thing to Lakshmi-behn, widow of Panditji Khare.

Hearing this Sushilabehn said to Ba, “Why do you again and again say like that? All of us will soon be out of jail.”

Ba replied, “Yes, you all will go out, but not I.”

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A LITTLE ARGUMENT

Ba’s last detention in the Aga Khan Palace rather told upon her health, specially because Bapu, she and the other leaders had been so suddenly swooped down upon, and also this time, unlike on previous occasions, they were not informed how long they will be detained.

Once, when she was somewhat seriously ill, Ba said to Bapu in a little ruffled tone, "Did I not tell you not to pick up a quarrel with the mighty British Empire? But you did not pay any heed to me. And so now we all have to suffer. But how long will the poor people be able to withstand the immense power of the Government?"

At first Bapu tried to argue with Ba in the matter. But finding that she was not in a mood to listen to any argument, he eventually asked her if both she and he should tender an apology to the Government.

Ba retorted, "Why should I ask any one's pardon?"

Bapu then inquired of Ba if it was her wish that he should write a letter to the Viceroy, seeking his pardon.

Ba, who could never bear any insult to Bapu, answered somewhat angrily, "Do you mean to suggest that young girls should go on rotting in prison, while you seek the Government's pardon? Well, now there is no other alternative but to continue to suffer. Mahadev's life has already ended in prison. Next it will be my turn."

But Bapu remained silent.

After a few days Ba said again to Bapu, “Why do you want the British to quit? Let them remain, as ours is a vast country, but, of course, as brothers and not as rulers.”

Bapu replied, “That is precisely what I have been telling them.”

Next day after having fully appreciated Bapu’s point of view, Ba said to Dr. Sushila Nayar, “These British people, you see, are very bad. Bapu wants them to stay on in India as brothers, but they will not. They want to lord it over us. That is why Bapu and the other leaders have been clapped into jail.”

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BA’S OBSERVANCE OF FASTS AND FESTIVALS

Ba always observed zealously the various fasts, mentioned in the Hindu calendar. She was never known to have missed any. On the contrary, if some time three or four fasts fell in succession, she kept all of them. The religious festival of Makarsankranti fell during her last illness. So Ba said, “Please get some sesame and make sweet balls and distribute them among the prisoners.”

Bapu, however, replied rather in a vein of criticism, "That will not be proper. For, we are not staying these days in our own home. Such things can be done only when we are at home."

Ba thereupon rejoined, "But there is no home-going for me!"

Ultimately, however, on the morrow, the sweet sesame balls were made and Ba herself, seated in a wheeled chair, distributed them among the inmates of the jail.

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BAPU : " I CANNOT KEEP BA AWAY FROM ME."

In 1942, when Bapu was in correspondence with the Viceroy about the current situation in the country and was planning to go on fast, in the event of absence of any satisfactory understanding between the Government and the people, he spent most of his time in contemplation. So one day Mirabehn said to Ba, "These days what Bapu needs specially is seclusion. So, perhaps, we should build a separate hut for him under the mango tree."

"No," replied Ba, "there is no need for a hut. For, Bapu can experience aloneness and quiet anywhere."

Hearing this, Bapu added, "Aloneness or solitude apart, I do not want, far less desire, to keep Ba away from me, particularly when she is not keeping well.

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BA'S PIOUS WISH

When during his detention, in the Aga Khan Palace, Bapu went on fast, Ba often felt that in response to her prayers, God would save him and, instead, take her away. So when a sister from the Ashram visited Bapu at the time, Ba said to her, when the latter was returning home, "Please do not fail to send me the sari, specially made for me out of the yarn spun by Bapu with his own hands. For, I would like it to be used as a shroud when I am dead."

Alas! this pious wish of Ba was at last fulfilled on February 22, 1944.

BA'S CONCERN ABOUT BAPU'S FAST

During his detention in 1942, Bapu once thought of sending a letter to the Viceroy, intimating his intention to go on fast if the Government did not stop its violence against the people. Ba, getting wind of this, said to Bapu, "You may, if you so wish, write the letter, but please do not mention in it anything about your inclination to fast." At this Bapu burst into laughter.

One day Sarojini Devi, seeing Ba somewhat worried, said to her, "Do not, please, worry. Bapu says that he will not fast, unless God gives him a definite directive and he hears the inner voice to this effect. I am sure God will never tell him to fast." Ba replied, "But I am afraid Bapu will all the same take it that God does wish him to fast."

At this time Bapu used to wait on God every day for half an hour to know His will in the matter, while Ba after her morning ablutions, would worship the *Tulsi* and pray for Bapu's long life.

SAVITRI-LIKE BA

On February 22, 1943, Bapu hovered between life and death,—so very feeble he had become as a result of the 21-day fast he had undertaken. Therefore, it was rather strange that Ba, whose health had been indifferent for quite some time, on the other hand, gained gradually in strength, both of body and mind, from the day the fast began, just as her worship of the *Tulsi* plant and of the image of child Krishna acquired greater intensity and earnestness. Mirabehn and Dr. Sushila Nayar often found Ba so deeply absorbed in her adoration in the verandah outside Bapu's room, that she was not at all conscious of their presence. And this elevating and touching sight brought tears into their eyes.

Once Dr. Sushila Nayar went to Bapu's room and pleaded with him to take some orange juice. But he declined, just as he had done on the third day of the fast, when Bapu had nausea, Ba's similar appeal. However, after a few minutes, Bapu indicated his assent. The juice somewhat restored him and there was a glow of returning life and strength on his face. At this time Ba entered the room and, finding

Bapu appreciably better, she felt as if God had answered her prayers. A year later, once referring to this incident, someone remarked, "A year ago on this very day Bapu seemed to be in the clutches of death. But Ba rescued him from the noose, as did Savitri, Satyavan, pledging that, instead, she would offer her own life as ransom."

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BAPU'S SERVICE OF BA

During Ba's last illness Bapu would frequently sit by the bedside of Ba, at night as well as during the day, though she would not let him sit there for long. Seeing this, one day Dr. Gilder told Dr. Sushilabehn, that it would be better if Bapu refrained, because, he added, the pneumonia germ is very poisonous and contagious. But who could muster up courage to convey all this to Bapu? So Dr. Nayar thought that to keep silent in the matter would be the better part of discretion. Dr. Gilder also later realized the delicacy of the situation, specially when the moment of Bapu's separation from his sixty-two-year-long life-companion seemed to be drawing near. As he said all this, tears welled up in his eyes.

Owing to increasing weakness, Ba spat out now and again. Her lips were, therefore, wiped with small pieces of cloth. One night when Bapu visited Ba, he suggested to Dr. Sushilabehn to have a few kerchiefs prepared for the purpose. Accordingly, this was done. Subsequently, whenever Bapu saw the used-up kerchiefs he would pick them up and take them to his room to wash. Dr. Nayar once chanced to see this and said, "Bapuji, we shall wash them. So please leave them there." Bapu answered, "No, I like to do the job."

On another day, after his midday meal, Bapu went to see Ba and sat by her bedside. Now if he sat there and Ba rested her head on his shoulder and went to sleep, he would not be able to get up till Ba woke up. Thus, Bapu would miss his midday hour of rest. Dr. Nayar, therefore, suggested that, instead, she would sit near Ba. Later on, after he has had his siesta, he could take her place. To this Bapu agreed, but as he lay down on his mattress he exclaimed, "How I wish I had been allowed to sit for some time longer near Ba's bedside!"

In the course of her prolonged illness, Ba was treated for her acute kidney complaint according to hydropathy. For this purpose Bapu had to spend daily nearly an hour on

the treatment. This tired him out. Ba noticed this and so suggested to Bapu that, instead, Dr. Sushilabehn should do the needful. Dr. Sushilabehn reinforced the suggestion by saying that as it was, Bapu was already hard pressed for time. Therefore, if he agreed he could save one hour of his precious time. Whereupon Bapu said, "God has given me this invaluable opportunity to serve Ba, so I would not like to let it go. I can gladly spare one hour for her."

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GOD'S NAME, THE ONLY PANACEA

Two days before her death, Ba suffered very much and every now and then she called out, "O God!" So often Bapu would sit on her bed, as she found some relief by resting her head on his shoulder. Sometimes he even said his prayers in this position. One day, however, he did not leave her at all. To comfort Ba there was continuous singing of hymns and chanting of the Holy Name. This was punctuated, however, with her periodical cry of pain, "O God!" Thereupon Bapu said, "It seems now the only medicine left for Ba is God's name. So all other treatment should

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be stopped. Personally, I would wish her to have only water and honey and no other food of any kind, unless, of course she herself asks for something special. I have no faith in medicines, as such. Even when my sons were seriously ill, I never administered any medicine to them. I have, however, made an exception in the case of Ba. But today she herself seems to be disinclined to take any medicine. Only God's name appears to give her some respite from suffering. This is, indeed, a touching sight and after my own heart. If it is God's will that she should survive, she would; otherwise He would take her away and I, too, would then let her go."

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BA : "RATHER REJOICE AT MY GOING AWAY."

Two days before she passed away Ba said to Bapu, "Why should one grieve at my going away? Rather, you all should rejoice." Then, folding her hands and closing her eyes, she prayed, "O God, like an animal all my life I have only filled my stomach. Now I need only love for, and devotion to, Thee."

“WHEN BA CALLS ME”

On the day Ba died, in the afternoon, at four o'clock Dr. Sushila Nayar went to Bapu and said, “Will you please take charge of Ba? For, I would like to have some rest.”

Bapu answered, “Very well, but I shall keep watch over her from where I am working. For, there are already several people sitting around her bedside. Of course, when she calls me, I shall at once go to her.”

And lo! soon afterwards it came to pass that, feeling extremely restless, Ba called out aloud, “Bapu”.

Immediately Bapu went up to Ba and she breathed her last in his lap.

WHO WAS MORE FORTUNATE?

February 22, 1944, the fast of Mahashivratri, Ba's last day on this earth. Her condition was critical. The doctors, attending on her, suggested that the patient should be injected with penicillin. But Bapu did not like this at all. Talking to his son, Devadas, he said, “Why

do you not have faith in God? You want to administer medicine to your mother even on her deathbed?"

It was now quarter-past seven in the evening. And yet Bapu did not go out for his usual evening walk, which had already been delayed by three-quarters of an hour. At last, when he was getting ready to go out, Ba called him to her bedside. Seeing her so restless he asked her, "What is ailing you?"

Ba, as if standing on the shore of some unknown country, answered like an innocent child, with a stammer, "I do not know."

She then tried to sit up, but Bapu dissuaded her from doing so. And placing her head in his lap, she drew her last breath.

Thus Ba's ardent wish to die with her head in Bapu's lap was fulfilled. Bapu himself had on one occasion observed, "Whosoever would have served Ba devotedly, she would, in her last moments, place her head in his lap."

Now who was more fortunate, Ba or Bapu? Perhaps, both.

BA — A POOR MAN'S WIFE

In connection with the cremation of Ba, Shri Shantikumar suggested that some sandalwood be used for fuel. Bapu protested and said, "Ba was a poor man's wife. How can a poor man afford any sandalwood?"

Whereupon the Superintendent of the Yeravda jail informed Bapu that they had some sandalwood in stock.

Bapu answered, "Then you, I mean the Government, can use sandalwood if you so wish, and, I would have no objection."

COMPANION FOR SIXTY-TWO YEARS

Ba's dead body was cremated alongside the *Samadhi*, where the ashes of Mahadevbhai had been deposited. What a coincidence! For, Ba had often said, "I will be always by the side of Mahadev."

The cremation ceremony lasted rather long, till four o'clock in the afternoon. But Bapu till the very end sat quietly near the funeral-pyre, in spite of repeated requests to get up and have some rest. But he did not budge

from there, saying as it were, out of the depths of his whole being, “How can I leave her like this,—she who was my companion in life for sixty-two long years? Even Ba would not forgive me for such a lapse.”

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BA — WARP AND WOOF OF BAPU’S LIFE

After Ba’s death, Shrimati Sushilabehn —the wife of Manilal Gandhi and Bapu’s daughter-in-law — came from South Africa to meet him. While talking to him, she just remarked casually, “Bapu, you seem to be feeling so lonely.”

At this Bapu grew serious and answered, “In my life Ba was woven like warp and woof. So without her I do feel, indeed, very lonely.”

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A HOUSEHOLDER’S ORDEAL

One day, after Ba was no more, in the course of conversation, Bapu said to Dr. Sushila Nayar, “What a strange but happy coincidence that in her last moments Ba sent for me, placed her head in my lap and passed away!”

Dr. Nayar replied, "Yes. But, Bapu, from all this it is evident that, though outwardly Ba might have at times been displeased with you, in her heart of hearts she had boundless love for, and devotion to, you. I have, indeed, not heard of or known any other instance of such exemplary relationship."

Inwardly feeling as it were blessed by Ba's abounding love for him, and rejoicing that his life as a householder had been a success because of her, Bapu said, "That is but too true. As a matter of fact, among us such visible demonstration of love between husband and wife and their loyalty to each other is rather uncommon."

115

SUCH WAS BA'S NATURE

A month and a half after Ba's death, Bapu had an attack of malaria. One day he said to Dr. Sushila Nayar, "It is good that while Ba lived I did not have fever. Otherwise she would have sent away every one of you to serve me, without any thought for her own needs."

Dr. Sushilabehn answered, "That is quite true. But I think Ba would have gone

still one step further. She would have herself attended on you, notwithstanding her own illness.”

Bapu, thereupon, said in a voice tremulous with emotion, “Yes, such *is* Ba’s nature.”

Then presently he corrected himself and added, “What I meant was that such *was* Ba’s nature.”

“But for you even today,” rejoined Dr. Nayar, “Ba is alive. She is not dead.”

“That is also true,” Bapu replied.

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BA’S PRESENCE

During her last illness, owing to asthmatic trouble, Ba often found it difficult to sleep. Therefore, a small table was ordered for her. On it she would rest her head and go to sleep. After she died, Bapu kept this table with him, saying, “This is extremely precious for me. For, whenever I see it, the picture of Ba resting her head on the table comes up before my mind’s eye.” Thereafter Bapu used it as his dining-table. In her lifetime Ba, as is well known, always sat by Bapu’s side whenever he took his meals. Her place, alas! was now taken by the table!

A PRECIOUS RELIC

Once, after Ba had passed away, the bottle, containing drinking water for Bapu, had to be wrapped in a wet cloth. Therefore, Bapu asked for a piece to be torn from the old cloth, he had often used on previous occasions for bandaging clay as a part of Nature-cure treatment. "Use it for the purpose," he said, adding, "as this cloth was often used for Ba, it is very valuable, indeed, for me."

APPENDIX I
BA AND BAPU

“(Ba) was illiterate. By nature she was simple, independent, persevering and, with me at least, reticent. She was not impatient of her ignorance and I do not recollect my studies having ever spurred her to go in for a similar adventure.”

* * *

“I was very eager to teach her. But there were two obstacles in the way: one, she had not as yet felt any hunger for knowledge and the other, that in our days, living in a joint family, it was not easy to satisfy this her hunger.”

* * *

“For one thing the teaching had to be done against her will, and that, too, at night. I dared not meet her in the presence of the elders, much less talk to her. Kathiawad had then, and to a certain extent has even today, its own peculiar, useless and barbarous purdah system. Circumstances were thus unfavourable. I must,

therefore, confess that most of my efforts to instruct Kasturbai in our youth were unsuccessful.”

* * *

“And when I awoke from the sleep of lust, I had already launched forth into public life, which did not leave me much spare time. I failed likewise to instruct her through private tutors. As a result, Kasturbai can now with difficulty write simple letters and understand simple Gujarati. I am sure that, had my love for her been absolutely untainted with lust, she would be a learned lady today; for, I could then have conquered her dislike for studies. I know that nothing is impossible for pure love.”

* * *

“But alas! the feelings of lust prevented me at the time from making her literate. Not only that, I vented out my spleen on her and sent her back to her parents. And only after she had suffered long, I called her back. However, it was later that I realized that all this was due to my ignorance.”

* * *

“Ba is blessed with one great quality to a very considerable degree, a quality which most

Hindu wives possess in some measure. And it is this: willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, she has considered herself blessed in following in my footsteps, and has never stood in the way of my endeavour to lead a life of restraint. Though, therefore, there is a wide difference between us intellectually, I have always had the feeling that ours is a life of contentment, happiness and progress.”

* * *

“It seems to me that the root cause, which attracted the public to Kasturba, was her ability to lose herself in me. I never insisted on this self-abnegation. She developed this quality on her own. At first I did not even know that she had it in her. According to my earlier experience, she was very obstinate. In spite of all my pressure she would do as she wished. This led to short or long periods of estrangement between us. But as my public life expanded, my wife bloomed forth and deliberately lost herself in my work. As time passed, I and my service of the people became one. She slowly merged herself in my activities. Perhaps, the Indian soil loves this quality most in a wife. Be it as it may, to me this seems to be the foremost reason for her popularity.”

“What developed the self-abnegation in her to the highest level was our Brahmacharya. The latter turned out to be more natural for her than for me. She was not aware of it at first. I made a resolve and Ba, as she was affectionately called, accepted it as her own. Thenceforward we became true friends. From 1906, really speaking from 1901, Ba had no other interest in staying with me except to help me in my work. She could not live away from me. She would have had no difficulty, if she had wished, in staying away from me. But as a woman and wife she considered it her duty to lose herself in me ever after. She did not cease looking after me till her last breath.”

APPENDIX II

IRREPARABLE LOSS AND SEPARATION

After Ba had been cremated all the mourners returned to their respective lodgings. But Bapu was still experiencing heart-rending pain. No doubt, he was a man of great soul and great knowledge and wisdom. But, he was so human as well. How could he not, then, feel his separation from Ba, who had been his companion, like his own shadow, so long?

That night he said in anguish, just as he was getting ready to go to bed: "It is true I had wished all along that she would precede me in departing from this earth. For, in that case, I thought, I would be free from all anxiety on her account, as to what would happen to her if she survived me. But she was an indivisible part of my being. Her death has, indeed, created a gap, which will never be filled up."

After a brief pause he continued, "But to what a severe test did God put me! Even if I had let penicillin be administered to Ba, she

would have still died. But in doing so I would have betrayed lack of faith in God. I had hardly prevailed upon Devadas not to have penicillin injected into Ba's body, when she seemed to be breathing her last. What a conjunction of circumstances! But inasmuch as she died in my lap, I feel very happy, indeed."

* * *

On another occasion a little later, he said, "While I am happy at the thought that Ba went away from this world before me, yet I must confess that the departure of my more-than-sixty-two-year-long-life companion has left me almost bewildered with sorrow."

* * *

After four days, again, when a reference to Ba was made in the course of a conversation, he remarked, "Ba's end was glorious. And yet if I feel so sorrow-stricken it is for a purely personal reason. I cannot as yet help recalling her memory over and over again."

* * *

Again after some time he observed, "Ba's death appears to be like a dream. Of course, I was prepared for it. But when she actually went away I was rather surprised! It seems

without her I cannot attend to my personal affairs adequately.”

* * *

On another occasion, once, talking of Ba, Bapu said, “Ba was completely wrapped up in me. She died in my lap. Which other woman has ever been so fortunate? Just before she passed away, she called me. I did not realize then that her end was near. What a happy coincidence that at that time I was not out on my usual evening walk! In this, too, I see God’s grace.”

* * *

A month after Ba had departed, one evening while walking about, Bapu said, “My sorrow at my separation from Ba is still not healed, even though my mind tells me that she could not have passed away under better circumstances. I was always fearful about her lest she survived me. So I wished that she would precede me to the cremation-ground. And yet I feel so sorrow-stricken. Maybe, I continue to think of Ba constantly, but this, too, is not quite true. In a word, I really cannot describe what I am feeling inwardly.”

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